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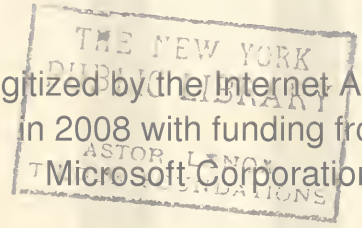
EDMUND GOSSE



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PREFACE

NUMEROUS and varied as have been the analyses of Ibsen's works published, in all languages, since the completion of his writings, there exists no biographical study which brings together, on a general plan, what has been recorded of his adventures as an author. Hitherto the only accepted Life of Ibsen has been *Et literært Livsbillede*, published in 1888 by Henrik Jæger; of this an English translation was issued in 1890. Henrik Jæger (who must not be confounded with the novelist, Hans Henrik Jæger) was a lecturer and dramatic critic, residing near Bergen, whose book would possess little value had he not succeeded in persuading Ibsen to give him a good deal of valuable information respecting his early life in that city. In its own day, principally on this account, Jæger's volume was useful, supplying a large number of facts which were new to the public. But the advance of Ibsen's activity, and the increase of knowledge since his death, have so much extended and modified the poet's history that *Et literært Livsbillede* has become obsolete.

The principal authorities of which I have made use in the following pages are the minute bibliographical *Oplysninger* of J. B. Halvorsen, marvels of ingenious labor, continued after Halvorsen's death by Sten Konow (1901); the *Letters of Henrik Ibsen*, published in two volumes, by H. Koht and J. Elias, in 1904, and now issued in an English translation (Hodder & Stoughton); the recollections and notes of various friends, published in the periodicals of Scandinavia and Germany after his death; T. Blanc's *Et Bidrag til den Ibsenskte Digtnings Scenehistorie* (1906); and, most of all, the invaluable *Samliv med Ibsen* (1906) of Johan Paulsen. This last-mentioned writer aspires, in measure, to be Ibsen's Boswell, and his book is a series of chapters reminiscent of the dramatist's talk and manners, chiefly during those central years of his life which he spent in Germany. It is a trivial, naïve and rather thin production, but it has something of the true Boswellian touch, and builds up before us a lifelike portrait.

From the materials, too, collected for many years past by Mr. William Archer, I have received important help. Indeed, of Mr. Archer it is difficult for an English student of Ibsen to speak with moderation. It is true that thirty-six years ago some of Ibsen's early metrical writings fell

into the hands of the writer of this little volume, and that I had the privilege, in consequence, of being the first person to introduce Ibsen's name to the British public. Nor will I pretend for a moment that it is not a gratification to me, after so many years and after such surprising developments, to know that this was the fact. But, save for this accident of time, it was Mr. Archer and no other who was really the introducer of Ibsen to English readers. For a quarter of a century he was the protagonist in the fight against misconstruction and stupidity; with wonderful courage, with not less wonderful good temper and persistency, he insisted on making the true Ibsen take the place of the false, and on securing for him the recognition due to his genius. Mr. William Archer has his reward; his own name is permanently attached to the intelligent appreciation of the Norwegian playwright in England and America.

In these pages, where the space at my disposal was so small, I have not been willing to waste it by repeating the plots of any of those plays of Ibsen which are open to the English reader. It would please me best if this book might be read in connection with the final edition of *Ibsen's Complete Dramatic Works*, now being prepared by Mr. Archer in eleven volumes (W. Heine-

mann, 1907). If we may judge of the whole work by those volumes of it which have already appeared, I have little hesitation in saying that no other foreign author of the second half of the nineteenth century has been so ably and exhaustively edited in English as Ibsen has been in this instance.

The reader who knows the Dano-Norwegian language may further be recommended to the study of Carl Nærup's *Norsk Litteraturhistories siste Tidsrum* (1905), a critical history of Norwegian literature since 1890, which is invaluable in giving a notion of the effect of modern ideas on the very numerous younger writers of Norway, scarcely one of whom has not been influenced in one direction or another by the tyranny of Ibsen's personal genius. What has been written about Ibsen in England and France has often missed something of its historical value by not taking into consideration that movement of intellectual life in Norway which has surrounded him and which he has stimulated. Perhaps I may be allowed to say of my little book that this side of the subject has been particularly borne in mind in the course of its composition.

E. G.

KLOBENSTEIN.

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

THE parentage of the poet has been traced back to a certain Danish skipper, Peter Ibsen, who, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, made his way over from Stege, the capital of the island of Möen. and became a citizen of Bergen. From that time forth the men of the family, all following the sea in their youth, jovial men of a humorous disposition, continued to haunt the coasts of Norway, marrying sinister and taciturn wives, who, by the way, were always, it would seem, Danes or Germans or Scotswomen, so that positively the poet had, after a hundred years and more of Norwegian habitation, not one drop of pure Norse blood to inherit from his parents. His grandfather, Henrik, was wrecked in 1798 in his own ship, which went down with all souls lost on Hesnæs, near Grimstad; this reef is the scene of Ibsen's animated poem of *Terje Viken*. His father, Knud, who was born in 1797, married in 1825 a German, Marichen Cornelia Martie Altenburg, of the same town of Skien; she was one year his senior, and the

daughter of a merchant. It was in 1771 that the Ibsens, leaving Bergen, had settled in Skien, which was, and still is, an important centre of the timber and shipping trades on the south-east shore of the country.

It may be roughly said that Skien, in the Danish days, was a sort of Poole or Dartmouth, existing solely for purposes of marine merchandise, and depending for prosperity, and life itself, on the sea. Much of a wire-drawn ingenuity has been conjectured about the probable strains of heredity which met in Ibsen. It is not necessary to do more than to recognize the slight but obstinate exoticism, which kept all his forbears more or less foreigners still in their Norwegian home; and to insist on the mixture of adventurousness and plain common sense which marked their movements by sea and shore. The stock was intensely provincial, intensely unambitious; it would be difficult to find anywhere a specimen of the lower middle class more consistent than the Ibsens had been in preserving their respectable dead level. Even in that inability to resist the call of the sea, generation after generation, if there was a little of the dare-devil there was still more of the conventional citizen. It is, in fact, a vain attempt to detect elements of his ancestors in the extremely startling and unprecedented son who was born to

Knud and Marichen Ibsen two years and three months after their marriage.

This son, who was baptized Henrik Johan, although he never used the second name, was born in a large edifice known as the Stockmann House, in the centre of the town of Skien, on March 20, 1828. The house stood on one side of a large, open square; the town pillory was at the right of it, and the mad-house, the lock-up and other amiable urban institutions to the left; in front was the Latin school and the grammar school, while the church occupied the middle of the square. Over this stern prospect the tourist can no longer sentimentalize, for the whole of this part of Skien was burned down in 1886, to the poet's unbridled satisfaction. "The inhabitants of Skien," he said with grim humor, "were quite unworthy to possess my birthplace."

He declared that the harsh elements of landscape, mentioned above, were those which earliest captivated his infant attention, and he added that the square space, with the church in the midst of it, was filled all day long with the dull and droning sound of many waterfalls, while from dawn to dusk this drone of waters was constantly cut through by a sound that was like the sharp screaming and moaning of women. This was caused by hundreds of saws at work beside the waterfalls, taking ad-

vantage of that force. "Afterwards, when I read about the guillotine, I always thought of those saws," said the poet, whose earliest flight of fancy seems to have been this association of womanhood with the shriek of the sawmill.

In 1888, just before his sixtieth birthday, Ibsen wrote out for Henrik Jæger certain autobiographical recollections of his childhood. It is from these that the striking phrase about the scream of the saws is taken, and that is perhaps the most telling of these infant memories, many of which are slight and naïve. It is interesting, however, to find that his earliest impressions of life at home were of an optimistic character. "Skien," he says, "in my young days, was an exceedingly lively and sociable place, quite unlike what it afterwards became. Several highly cultivated and wealthy families lived in the town itself or close by on their estates. Most of these families were more or less closely related, and dances, dinners and music parties followed each other, winter and summer, in almost unbroken sequence. Many travellers, too, passed through the town, and, as there were as yet no regular inns, they lodged with friends or connections. We almost always had guests in our large, roomy house, especially at Christmas and Fair-time, when the house was full, and we kept open table from morning till night."

The mind reverts to the majestic old wooden mansions which play so prominent a part in Thomas Krag's novels, or to the house of Mrs. Solness' parents, the burning down of which started the Master-Builder's fortunes. Most of these grand old timber houses in Norway have indeed, by this time, been so burned down.

We may speculate on what the effect of this genial open-handedness might have been, had it lasted, on the genius of the poet. But fortune had harsher views of what befitted the training of so acrid a nature. When Ibsen was eight years of age, his father's business was found to be in such disorder that everything had to be sold to meet his creditors. The only piece of property left when this process had been gone through was a little broken-down farmhouse called Venstöb, in the outskirts of Skien. Ibsen afterwards stated that those who had taken most advantage of his parents' hospitality in their prosperous days were precisely those who now most markedly turned the cold shoulder on them. It is likely enough that this may have been the case, but one sees how inevitably Ibsen would, in after years, be convinced that it was. He believed himself to have been, personally, much mortified and humiliated in childhood by the change in the family status. Already, by all accounts, he had begun to live a

life of moral isolation. His excellent sister long afterwards described him as an unsociable child, never a pleasant companion, and out of sympathy with all the rest of the family.

We recollect, in *The Wild Duck*, the garret which was the domain of Hedvig and of that symbolic bird. At Venstöb, the infant Ibsen possessed a like retreat, a little room near the back entrance, which was sacred to him and into the fastness of which he was accustomed to bolt himself. Here were some dreary old books, among others Harrison's folio *History of the City of London*, as well as a paint-box, an hour-glass, an extinct eight-day clock, properties which were faithfully introduced, half a century later, into *The Wild Duck*. His sister says that the only out-door amusement he cared for as a boy was building, and she describes the prolonged construction of a castle, in the spirit of *The Master-Builder*.

Very soon he began to go to school, but to neither of the public institutions in the town. He attended what is described as a "small middle-class school," kept by a man called Johan Hansen, who was the only person connected with his childhood, except his sister, for whom the poet retained in after life any agreeable sentiment. "Johan Hansen," he says, "had a mild, amiable temper, like that of a child," and when he died, in 1865,

Ibsen mourned him. The sexton at Skien, who helped in the lessons, described the poet afterwards as "a quiet boy with a pair of wonderful eyes, but with no sort of cleverness except an unusual gift for drawing." Hansen taught Ibsen Latin and theology, gently, perseveringly, without any striking results; that the pupil afterwards boasted of having successfully perused Phædrus in the original is in itself significant. So little was talent expected from him that when, at the age of about fifteen, he composed a rather melodramatic description of a dream, the schoolmaster looked at him gloomily, and said he must have copied it out of some book! One can imagine the shocked silence of the author, "passive at the nadir of dismay."

No great wild swan of the flocks of Phœbus ever began life as a more ungainly duckling than Ibsen did. The ingenuity of biographers has done its best to brighten up the dreary record of his childhood with anecdotes, yet the sum of them all is but a dismal story. The only talent which was supposed to lurk in the napkin was that for painting. A little while before he left school, he was found to have been working hard with water-colors. Various persons have recalled finished works of the young Ibsen—a romantic landscape of the ironworks at Fossum, a view from

the windows at Venstöb, a boy in peasant dress seated on a rock, the latter described by a dignitary of the church as "awfully splendid," *overmaade prægtigt*. One sees what kind of painting this must have been, founded on some impression of Fearnley and Tidemann, a far-away following of the new "national" art of the praiseworthy "patriot-painters" of the school of Dahl.

It is interesting to remember that Pope, who had considerable intellectual relationship with Ibsen, also nourished in childhood the ambition to be a painter, and drudged away at his easel for weeks and months. As he to the insipid Jervases and Knellers whom he copied, so Ibsen to the conscientious romantic artists of Norway's prime. In neither case do we wish that an Ibsen or a Pope should be secured for the National Gallery, but it is highly significant that such earnest students of precise excellence in another art should first of all have schooled their eyes to exactitude by grappling with form and color.

In 1843, being fifteen years of age, Ibsen was confirmed and taken away from school. These events marked the beginning of adolescence with a young middle-class Norwegian of those days, for whom the future proposed no task in life demanding a more elaborate education than the local schoolmaster could give. Ibsen announced

his wish to be a professional artist, but that was one which could not be indulged. Until a later date than this, every artist in Norway was forced to go abroad for the necessary technical training: as a rule, students went to Dresden, because J. C. Dahl was there; but many settled in Düsseldorf, where the teaching attracted them. In any case, the adoption of a plastic profession meant a long and serious expenditure of money, together with a very doubtful prospect of ultimate remuneration. Fearnley, who had seemed the very genius of Norwegian art, had just (1842) died, having scarcely begun to sell his pictures, at the age of forty. It is not surprising that Knud Ibsen, whose affairs were in a worse condition than ever, refused even to consider a course of life which would entail a heavy and long-continued expense.

Ibsen hung about at home for a few months, and then, shortly before his sixteenth birthday, he was apprenticed to an apothecary of the name of Reimann, at the little town of Grimstad, between Arendal and Christianssand, on the extreme south-east corner of the Norwegian coast. This was his home for more than five years; here he became a poet, and here the peculiar color and tone of his temperament were developed. So far as the genius of a very great man is influenced by his surroundings, and by his physical con-

dition in those surroundings, it was the atmosphere of Grimstad and of its drug-store which moulded the character of Ibsen. Skien and his father's house dropped from him like an old suit of clothes. He left his parents, whom he scarcely knew, the town which he hated, the schoolmates and schoolmasters to whom he seemed a surly dunce. We find him next, with an apron round his middle and a pestle in his hand, pounding drugs in a little apothecary's shop in Grimstad. What *Blackwood's* so basely insinuated of Keats —"Back to the shop, Mr. John, stick to plasters, pills and ointment-boxes," inappropriate to the author of *Endymion*, was strictly true of the author of *Peer Gynt*.

Curiosity and hero-worship once took the author of these lines to Grimstad. It is a marvellous object-lesson on the development of genius. For nearly six years (from 1844 to 1850), and those years the most important of all in the moulding of character and talent, one of the most original and far-reaching imaginations which Europe has seen for a century was cooped up here among ointment-boxes, pills and plasters. Grimstad is a small, isolated, melancholy place, connected with nothing at all, visitable only by steamer. Featureless hills surround it, and it looks out into the east wind, over a dark bay dotted with naked rocks.

No industry, no objects of interest in the vicinity, a perfect uniformity of little red houses where nobody seems to be doing anything; in Ibsen's time there are said to have been about five hundred of these apathetic inhabitants. Here, then, for six interminable years, one of the acutest brains in Europe had to interest itself in fraying ipecacuanha and mixing black draughts behind an apothecary's counter.

For several years nothing is recorded, and there was probably very little that demanded record, of Ibsen's life at Grimstad. His own interesting notes, it is obvious, refer only to the closing months of the period. Ten years before the birth of Ibsen one of the greatest poets of Europe had written words which seem meant to characterize an adolescence such as his. "The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted; thence proceed mawkishness and a thousand bitters."

It is easy to discover that Ibsen, from his sixteenth to his twentieth year, suffered acutely from this moral and intellectual distemper. He was at war—the phrase is his own—with the little community in which he lived. And yet it seems to

have been, in its tiny way, a tolerant and even friendly little community. It is difficult for us to realize what life in a remote coast-town of Norway would be sixty years ago. Connection with the capital would be rare and difficult, and, when achieved, the capital was as yet little more than we should call a village. There would, perhaps, be a higher uniformity of education among the best inhabitants of Grimstad than we are prepared to suppose. A certain graceful veneer of culture, an old-fashioned Danish elegance reflected from Copenhagen, would mark the more conservative citizens, male and female. A fierier generation—not hot enough, however, to set the fjord on flame—would celebrate the comparatively recent freedom of the country in numerous patriotic forms. It is probable that a dark boy like Ibsen would, on the whole, prefer the former type, but he would despise them both.

He was poor, excruciatingly poor, with a poverty that excluded all indulgence, beyond the bare necessities, in food and clothes and books. We can conceive the meagre advance of his position, first a mere apprentice, then an assistant, finally buoyed up by the advice of friends to study medicine and pharmacy, in the hope of being, some bright day, himself no less than the owner of

a drug-store. Did Mr. Anstey know this, or was it the sheer adventure of genius, when he concentrated the qualities of the master into "Pill-Doctor Herdal," compounding "beautiful rainbow-colored powders that will give one a real grip on the world"? Ibsen, it is allowable to think, may sometimes have dreamed of a pill, "with arsenic in it, Hilda, and digitalis, too, and strychnine, and the best beetle-killer," which would decimate the admirable inhabitants of Grimstad, strewing the rocks with their bodies in their best go-to-meeting coats and dresses. He had in him that source of anger, against which all argument is useless, which bubbles up in the heart of a youth who vaguely feels himself possessed of great native energy, and knows not how to stir a hand or even formulate a wish. He was savage in manners, unprepossessing in appearance, and, as he himself has told us with pathetic *naïveté*, unable to express the real gratitude he felt to the few who would willingly have extended friendship to him if he had permitted it.

As he advanced in age, he does not seem to have progressed in grace. By the respectable citizens of Grimstad—and even Grimstad had its little inner circle of impenetrable aristocracy—he was regarded as "not quite nice." The apothecary's assistant was a bold young man, who did

not seem to realize his menial position. He was certainly intelligent, and Grimstad would have overlooked the pills and ointments if his manners had been engaging, but he was rude, truculent and contradictory. The youthful female sex is not in the habit of sharing the prejudices of its elders in this respect, and many a juvenile Orson has, in such conditions, enjoyed substantial successes. But young Ibsen was not a favorite even with the girls, whom he alarmed and disconcerted. One of the young ladies of Grimstad in after years attempted to describe the effect which the poet made upon them. They had none of them liked him, she said, "because"—she hesitated for the word—"because he was so *spectral*." This gives us just the flash we want; it reveals to us for a moment the distempered youth, almost incorporeal, displayed wandering about at twilight and in lonely places, held in common esteem to be malevolent, and expressing by gestures rather than by words sentiments of a nature far from complimentary or agreeable.

Thus life at Grimstad seems to have proceeded until Ibsen reached his twenty-first year. In this quiet backwater of a seaport village the passage of time was deliberate, and the development of hard-worked apothecaries was slow. Ibsen's nature was not in any sense precocious, and even if

he had not languished in so lost a corner of society, it is unlikely that he would have started prematurely in life or literature. The actual waking up, when it came at last, seems to have been almost an accident. There had been some composing of verses, now happily lost, and some more significant distribution of "epigrams" and "caricatures" to the vexation of various worthy persons. The earliest trace of talent seems to have been in this direction, in the form of lampoons or "characters," as people called them in the seventeenth century, sarcastic descriptions of types in which certain individuals could be recognized. No doubt if these could be recovered, we should find them rough and artless, but containing germs of the future keenness of portraiture. They were keen enough, it seems, to rouse great resentment in Grimstad.

There is evidence to show that the lad had docility enough, at all events, to look about for some aid in the composition of Norwegian prose. We should know nothing of it but for a passage in Ibsen's later polemic with Paul Jansenius Stub of Bergen. In 1848 Stub was an invalid schoolmaster, who, it appears, eked out his income by giving instruction, by correspondence, in style. How Ibsen heard of him does not seem to be known, but when, in 1851, Ibsen entered,

with needless acrimony, into a controversy with his previous teacher about the theatre, Stub complained of his ingratitude, since he had "taught the boy to write." Stub's intervention in the matter, doubtless, was limited to the correction of a few exercises.

Ibsen's own theory was that his intellect and character were awakened by the stir of revolution throughout Europe. The first political event which really interested him was the proclamation of the French Republic, which almost coincided with his twentieth birthday. He was born again, a child of '48. There were risings in Vienna, in Milan, in Rome. Venice was proclaimed a republic, the Pope fled to Gaeta, the streets of Berlin ran with the blood of the populace. The Magyars rose against Jellalic and his Croat troops; the Czechs demanded their autonomy; in response to the revolutionary feeling in Germany, Schleswig-Holstein was up in arms.

Each of these events, and others like them, and all occurring in the rapid months of that momentous year, smote like hammers on the door of Ibsen's brain, till it quivered with enthusiasm and excitement. The old brooding languor was at an end, and with surprising clearness and firmness he saw his pathway cut out before him as a poet and as a man. The old clouds vanished, and

though the social difficulties which hemmed in his career were as gross as ever, he himself no longer doubted what was to be his aim in life. The cry of revolution came to him, of revolution faint indeed and broken, the voice of a minority appealing frantically and for a moment against the overwhelming forces of a respectable majority, but it came to him just at the moment when his young spirit was prepared to receive it with faith and joy. The effect on Ibsen's character was sudden and it was final:

> Then he stood up, and trod to dust
> Fear and desire, mistrust and trust,
> And dreams of bitter sleep and sweet,
> And bound for sandals on his feet
> Knowledge and patience of what must
> And what things may be, in the heat
> And cold of years that rot and rust
> And alter; and his spirit's meat
> Was freedom, and his staff was wrought
> Of strength, and his cloak woven of thought.

We are not left to conjecture on the subject; in a document of extreme interest, which seems somehow to have escaped the notice of his commentators, the preface to the second (1876) edition of *Catilina*, he has described what the influences were which roused him out of the wretchedness of Grimstad; they were precisely the

revolution of February, the risings in Hungary, the first Schleswig war. He wrote a series of sonnets, now apparently lost, to King Oscar, imploring him to take up arms for the help of Denmark, and of nights, when all his duties were over at last, and the shop shut up, he would creep to the garret where he slept, and dream himself fighting at the centre of the world, instead of lost on its extreme circumference. And here he began his first drama, the opening lines of which,

> "I must, I must; a voice is crying to me
> From my soul's depth, and I will follow it,"

might be taken as the epigraph of Ibsen's whole life's work.

In one of his letters to Georg Brandes he has noted, with that clairvoyance which marks some of his utterances about himself, the "full-blooded egotism" which developed in him during his last year of mental and moral starvation at Grimstad. Through the whole series of his satiric dramas we see the little narrow-minded borough, with its ridiculous officials, its pinched and hypocritical social order, its intolerable laws and ordinances, modified here and there, expanded sometimes, modernized and brought up to date, but always recurrent in the poet's memory. To the last, the images and the rebellions which were burned into

his soul at Grimstad were presented over and over again to his readers.

But the necessity of facing the examination at Christiania now presented itself. He was so busily engaged in the shop that he had, as he says, to steal his hours for study. He still inhabited the upper room, which he calls a garret; it would not seem that the alteration in his status, assistant now and no longer apprentice, had increased his social conveniences. He was still the overworked apothecary, pounding drugs with a pestle and mortar from morning till night. Someone has pointed out the odd circumstance that almost every scene in the drama of *Catilina* takes place in the dark. This was the unconscious result of the fact that all the attention which the future realist could give to the story had to be given in the night hours. When he emerged from the garret, it was to read Latin with a candidate in theology, a Mr. Monrad, brother of the afterwards famous professor. By a remarkable chance, the subject given by the University for examination was the Conspiracy of Catiline, to be studied in the history of Sallust and the oration of Cicero.

No theme could have been more singularly well fitted to fire the enthusiasm of Ibsen. At no time of his life a linguist, or much interested in history, it is probable that the difficulty of con-

centrating his attention on a Latin text would have been insurmountable had the subject been less intimately sympathetic to him. But he tells us that he had no sooner perceived the character of the man against whom these diatribes are directed than he devoured them greedily (*jeg slugte disse skrifter*). The opening words of Sallust, which every schoolboy has to read—we can imagine with what an extraordinary force they would strike upon the resounding emotion of such a youth as Ibsen. *Lucius Catilina nobili genere natus, magna vi et animi et corporis, sed ingenio malo pravoque* —how does this at once bring up an image of the arch-rebel, of Satan himself, as the poets have conceived him, how does it attract, with its effects of energy, intelligence and pride, the curiosity of one whose way of life, as Keats would say, is still undecided, his ambition still thick-sighted!

It was Sallust's picture more than Cicero's that absorbed Ibsen. Criticism likes to trace a predecessor behind every genius, a Perugino for Raffaelle, a Marlowe for Shakespeare. If we seek for the master-mind that started Ibsen, it is not to be found among the writers of his age or of his language. The real master of Ibsen was Sallust. There can be no doubt that the cold and bitter strength of Sallust; his unflinching method of building up his edifice of invective, stone by

stone; his close, unidealistic, dry penetration into character; his clinical attitude, unmoved at the death-bed of a reputation; that all these qualities were directly operative on the mind and intellectual character of Ibsen, and went a long way to mould it while moulding was still possible.

There is no evidence to show that the oration of Cicero moved him nearly so much as the narratives of Sallust. After all, the object of Cicero was to crush the conspiracy, but what Ibsen was interested in was the character of Catiline, and this was placed before him in a more thrilling way by the austere reserve of the historian. No doubt, to a young poet, when that poet was Ibsen, there would be something deeply attractive in the sombre, archaic style, and icy violence of Sallust. How thankful we ought to be that the historian, with his long sonorous words—*flagitiosorum ac facinorosorum*—did not make of our perfervid apothecary a mere tub-thumper of Corinthian prose!

Ibsen now formed the two earliest friendships of his life. He had reached the age of twenty without, as it would seem, having been able to make his inner nature audible to those around him. He had been to the inhabitants of Grimstad a stranger within their gates, not speaking their language; or, rather, wholly "spectral,"

speaking no language at all, but indulging in cat-calls and grimaces. He was now discovered like Caliban, and tamed, and made vocal, by the strenuous arts of friendship. One of those who thus interpreted him was a young musician, Due, who held a post in the custom-house; the other was Ole Schulerud (1827–59), who deserves a cordial acknowledgment from every admirer of Ibsen. He also was in the receipt of custom, and a young man of small independent means. To Schulerud and to Due, Ibsen revealed his poetic plans, and he seems to have found in them both sympathizers with his republican enthusiasms and transcendental schemes for the liberation of the peoples. It was a stirring time, in 1848, and all generous young blood was flowing fast in the same direction.

Since Ibsen's death, Due has published a very lively paper of recollections of the old Grimstad days. He says:

> His daily schedule admitted few intervals for rest or sleep. Yet I never heard Ibsen complain of being tired. His health was uniformly good. He must have had an exceptionally strong constitution, for when his financial conditions compelled him to practice the most stringent economy, he tried to do without underclothing, and finally even without stockings. In these experiments he succeeded; and in winter he went without an overcoat; yet without being troubled by colds or other bodily ills.

We have seen that Ibsen was so busy that he had to steal from his duties the necessary hours for study. But out of these hours, he tells us, he stole moments for the writing of poetry, of the revolutionary poetry of which we have spoken, and for a great quantity of lyrics of a sentimental and fanciful kind. Due was the confidant to whom he recited the latter, and one at least of these early pieces survives, set to music by this friend. But to Schulerud a graver secret was intrusted, no less than that in the night hours of 1848–49 there was being composed in the garret over the apothecary's shop a three-act tragedy in blank verse, on the conspiracy of Catiline. With his own hand, when the first draft was completed, Schulerud made a clean copy of the drama, and in the autumn of 1849 he went to Christiania with the double purpose of placing *Catilina* at the theatre and securing a publisher for it. A letter (October 15, 1849) from Ibsen, first printed in 1904—the only document we possess of this earliest period—displays to a painful degree the torturing anxiety with which the poet awaited news of his play, and, incidentally, exposes his poverty. With all Schulerud's energy, he found it impossible to gain attention for *Catilina* at the theatre, and in January, 1850, Ibsen received what he called its "death warrant," but it was

presently brought out as a volume, under the pseudonym of Brynjolf Bjarme, at Schulerud's expense. Of *Catilina* about thirty copies were sold, and it attracted no notice whatever from the press.

Meanwhile, left alone in Grimstad, since Due was now with Schulerud in Christiania, Ibsen had been busy with many literary projects. He had been writing an abundance of lyrics, he had begun a one-act drama called "The Normans," afterwards turned into *Kæmpehöjen;* he was planning a romance, *The Prisoner at Akershus* (this was to deal with the story of Christian Lofthus); and above all he was busy writing a tragedy of *Olaf Trygvesön.*[1]

One of his poems had already been printed in a Christiania newspaper. The call was overwhelming; he could endure Grimstad and the gallipots no longer. In March, 1850, at the age of twenty-one, Ibsen stuck a few dollars in his pocket and went off to try his fortune in the capital.

[1] On the authority of the *Breve*, pp. 58, 59, where Halvdan Koht prints "Olaf Tr." and "Olaf T." expanding these to Tr[ygvesön]. But is it quite certain that what Ibsen wrote in these letters was not "Olaf Li." and "Olaf L.," and that the reference is not to *Olaf Liljekrans*, which was certainly begun at Grimstad? Is there any other evidence that Ibsen ever started an *Olaf Trygvesön?*

CHAPTER II

EARLY INFLUENCES

In middle life Ibsen, who suppressed for as long a time as he could most of his other juvenile works, deliberately lifted *Catilina* from the oblivion into which it had fallen, and replaced it in the series of his writings. This is enough to indicate to us that he regarded it as of relative importance, and imperfect as it is, and unlike his later plays, it demands some critical examination. I do not know whether any one ever happened to ask Ibsen whether he had been aware that Alexandre Dumas produced in Paris a five-act drama of *Catiline* at the very moment (October, 1848) when Ibsen started the composition of his. It is quite possible that the young Norwegian saw this fact noted in a newspaper, and immediately determined to try what he could make of the same subject. In Dumas' play Catiline is presented merely as a demagogue; he is the red Flag personified, and the political situation in France is discussed under a slight veil of Roman history.

Catiline is simply a sort of Robespierre brought up to date. There is no trace of all this in Ibsen.

Oddly enough, though the paradox is easily explained, we find much more similarity when we compare the Norwegian drama with that tragedy of *Catiline* which Ben Jonson published in 1611. Needless to state, Ibsen had never read the old English play; it would be safe to lay a wager that, when he died, Ibsen had never heard or seen the name of Ben Jonson. Yet there is an odd sort of resemblance, founded on the fact that each poet keeps very close to the incidents recorded by the Latins. Neither of them takes Sallust's presentment of the character of Catiline as if it were gospel, but, while holding exact touch with the narrative, each contrives to add a native grandeur to the character of the arch-conspirator, such as his original detractors denied him. In both poems, Ben Jonson's and Ibsen's, Catiline is—

> Armed with a glory high as his despair.

Another resemblance between the old English and the modern Norwegian dramatist is that each has felt the solid stuff of the drama to require lightening, and has attempted to provide this by means, in Ben Jonson's case, of solemn "choruses," in Ibsen's of lyrics. In the latter instance the

tragedy ends in rolling and rhymed verse, little suited to the stage.

This is a very curious example, among many which might be brought forward, of Ibsen's native partiality for dramatic rhyme. In all his early plays, his tendency is to slip into the lyrical mood. This tendency reached its height nearly twenty years later in *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, and the truth about the austere prose which he then adopted for his dramas is probably this, not that the lyrical faculty had quitted him, but that he found it to be hampering his purely dramatic expression, and that he determined, by a self-denying ordinance, to tear it altogether off his shoulders, like an embroidered mantle, which is in itself very ornamental, but which checks an actor's movements.

The close of Ibsen's *Catilina* is, as we have said, composed entirely in rhyme, and the effect of this is curious. It is as though the young poet could not restrain the rhythm bubbling up in him, and was obliged to start running, although the moment was plainly one for walking. Here is a fragment. Catiline has stabbed Aurelia, and left her in the tent for dead. But while he was soliloquizing at the door of the tent, Fulvia has stabbed him. He lies dying at the foot of a tree, and makes a speech which ends thus:—

See, the pathway breaks, divided! I will wander, dumb,
To the left hand.

AURELIA

(*appearing, blood-stained, at the door of the tent*).
Nay! the right hand! Towards Elysium.

CATILINE

(*greatly alarmed*).

O yon pallid apparition, how it fills me with remorse.
'Tis herself! Aurelia! tell me, art thou living? not a corse?

AURELIA.

Yes, I live that I may lull thy sea of sorrows, and may lie
With my bosom pressed a moment to thy bosom, and then die.

CATILINE

(*bewildered*).

What? thou livest?

AURELIA.

Death's pale herald o'er my senses threw a pall,
But my dulled eye tracked thy footsteps, and I saw, I saw it all,
And my passion a wife's forces to my wounded body gave;
Breast to breast, my Catiline, let us sink into our grave.[1]

He had slipped far out of the sobriety of Sallust when he floundered, in this way, in the deep waters of romanticism. In the isolation of Grim-

[1] In 1875 Ibsen practically rewrote the whole of this part of *Catilina*, without, however, improving it. Why will great authors confuse the history of literature by tampering with their early texts?

stad he had but himself to consult, and the mind of a young poet who has not yet enjoyed any generous communication with life is invariably sentimental and romantic. The critics of the North have expended a great deal of ingenuity in trying to prove that Ibsen exposed his own temperament and character in the course of *Catilina*. No doubt there is a great temptation to indulge in this species of analysis, but it is amusing to note that some of the soliloquies which have been pointed out as particularly self-revealing are translated almost word for word out of Sallust. Perhaps the one passage in the play which is really significant is that in which the hero says:—

> If but for one brief moment I could flame
> And blaze through space, and be a falling star;
> If only once, and by one glorious deed,
> I could but knit the name of Catiline
> With glory and with deathless high renown,—
> Then should I blithely, in the hour of conquest,
> Leave all, and hie me to an alien shore,
> Press the keen dagger gayly to my heart,
> And die; for then I should have lived indeed.

This has its personal interest, since we know, on the evidence of his sister, that such was the tenor of Ibsen's private talk about himself at that precise time.

Very imperfect as *Catilina* is in dramatic art, and very primitive as is the development of plot in it, it presents one aspect, as a literary work, which is notable. That it should exist at all is curious, since, surprising as it seems, it had no precursor. Although, during the thirty-five years of Norwegian independence, various classes of literature had been cultivated with extreme diligence, the drama had hitherto been totally neglected. With the exception of a graceful opera by Bjerregaard, which enjoyed a success sustained over a quarter of a century, the only writings in dramatic form produced in Norway between 1815 and 1850 were the absurd lyrical farces of Wergeland, which were devoid of all importance. Such a thing as a three-act tragedy in blank verse was unknown in modern Norway, so that the youthful apothecary in Grimstad, whatever he was doing, was not slavishly copying the fashions of his own countrymen.

The principal, if not the only influence which acted upon Ibsen at this moment, was that of the great Danish tragedian, Adam Oehlenschläger. It might be fantastically held that the leading romantic luminary of Scandinavia withdrew on purpose to make room for his realistic successor, since Oehlenschläger's latest play, *Kiartan and Gudrun*, appeared just when Ibsen was planning

Catilina, while the death of the Danish poet (January 20, 1850) was practically simultaneous with Ibsen's arrival in Christiania. In later years, Ibsen thought that Holberg and Oehlenschläger were the only dramatists he had read when his own first play was written; he was sure that he knew nothing of Schiller, Shakespeare or the French. Of the rich and varied dramatic literature of Denmark, in the generation between Oehlenschläger's and his own, he must also for the present have known nothing. The influence of Heiberg and of Hertz, presently to be so potent, had evidently not yet begun. But it is important to perceive that already Norway, and Norwegian taste and opinion, were nothing to him in his selection of themes and forms.

It is not to be supposed that the taste for dramatic performances did not exist in Norway, because no Norwegian plays were written. On the contrary, in most of the large towns there were, and had long been, private theatres or rooms which could be fitted up with a stage, at which wandering troupes of actors gave performances that were eagerly attended by "the best people." These actors, however, were exclusively Danes, and there was an accepted tradition that Norwegians could not act. If they attempted to do so, their native accents proved

disagreeable to their fellow-citizens, who demanded, as an imperative condition, the peculiar intonation and pronunciation cultivated at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, as well as an absence of all native peculiarities of language. The stage, therefore—and this is very important in a consideration of the career of Ibsen—had come to be the symbol of a certain bias in political feeling. Society in Norway was divided into two classes, the "Danomaniacs" and the "Patriots." Neither of these had any desire to alter the constitutional balance of power, but while the latter wished Norway to be intellectually self-productive, and leaned to a further isolation in language, literature, art and manners, the former thought that danger of barbarism lay in every direction save that of keeping close to the tradition of Denmark, from which all that was witty, graceful and civilized had proceeded.

Accordingly the theatre, at which exclusively Danish plays were acted, in the Danish style, by Danish actors and actresses, was extremely popular with the conservative class, who thought, by attendance on these performances, to preserve the distinction of language and the varnish of "high life" which came, with so much prestige, from Copenhagen. By the patriotic party, on the other hand, the stage was looked upon with grave sus-

Ibsen in 1868.

picion as likely to undermine the purity of national feeling.

The earliest attempt at the opening of a National Theatre had been made at Christiania by the Swede, J. P. Strömberg, in 1827; this was not successful, and his theatre was burned down in 1835. In it some effort had been made to use the Norwegian idiom and to train native actors, but it had been to no avail. The play-going public liked their plays to be Danish, and even nationalists of a pronounced species could not deny that dramas like the great historical tragedies of Oehlenschläger, many of which dealt enthusiastically with legends that were peculiarly Norwegian, were as national as it was possible for poems by a foreign poet to be. All this time, it must be remembered, Christiania was to Copenhagen as Dublin till lately was to London, or as New York was half a century ago. It is in the arts that the old colonial instinct of dependence is most loath to disappear.

The party of the nationalists, however, had been steadily increasing in activity, and the universal quickening of patriotic pulses in 1848 had not been without its direct action upon Norway. Nevertheless, for various reasons of internal policy, there was perhaps no country in Europe where this period of seismic disturbance led to

less public turmoil than precisely here in the North. The accession of a new king, Oscar I, in 1844, had been followed by a sense of renewed national security; the peasants were satisfied that the fresh reign would be favorable to their rights and liberties; and the monarch showed every inclination to leave his country of Norway as much as possible to its own devices. The result of all this was that '48 left no mark on the internal history of the country, and the fever which burned in youthful bosoms was mainly, if not entirely, intellectual and transcendental. The young Catiline from Grimstad, therefore, met with several sympathetic rebels, but found nobody willing to conspire. But what he did find is so important in the consideration of his future development that it is needful briefly to examine it.

Norway had, in 1850, been independent of Denmark for thirty-six years. During the greater part of that time the fiery excitements of a struggle for politic existence had fairly exhausted her mental resources, and had left her powerless to inaugurate a national literature. Meanwhile, there was no such discontinuity in the literary and scientific relations of the two countries as that which had broken their constitutional union. A tremendous effort was made by certain patriots to discover the basis of an entirely independent intel-

lectual life, something that should start like the phœnix from the ashes of the old *régime*, and should offer no likeness with what continued to flourish south of the Skagarak. But all the efforts of the University of Christiania were vain to prevent the cultivated classes from looking to Copenhagen as their centre of light. Such authors as there were, and they were few indeed, followed humbly in the footsteps of their Danish brethren.

Patriotic historians of literature are not always to be trusted, and those who study native handbooks of Norwegian criticism must be on their guard when these deal with the three poets who "inaugurated in song the young liberties of Norway." The writings of the three celebrated lyric patriots, Schwach, Bjerregaard and Hansen, will not bear to have the blaze of European experience cast upon them; their tapers dwindle to sparks in the light of day. They gratified the vanity of the first generation after 1815, but they deserve no record in the chronicles of poetic art. If Ibsen ever read these rhymes of circumstance, it must have been to treat them with contempt.

Twenty years after the Union, however, and in Ibsen's early childhood, an event occurred which was unique in the history of Norwegian literature, and the consequences of which were far-reaching. As is often the case in countries where the art of

verse is as yet little exercised, there grew up about 1830 a warm and general, but uncritical, delight in poetry. This instinct was presently satisfied by the effusion of a vast quantity of metrical writing, most of it very bad, and was exasperated by a violent personal feud which for a while interested all educated persons in Norway to a far greater degree than any other intellectual or, for the time being, even political question. From 1834 to 1838 the interests of all cultivated people centred around what was called the "Twilight Feud" (*Dæmringsfejden*), and no record of Ibsen's intellectual development can be complete without a reference to this celebrated controversy, the results of which long outlived the popularity of its skits and pamphlets.

Modern Norwegian literature began with this great fight. The protagonists were two poets of undoubted talent, whose temperaments and tendencies were so diametrically opposed that it seemed as though Providence must have set them down in that raw and inflammable civilization for the express purpose of setting the standing corn of thought on fire. Henrik Wergeland (1808–45) was a belated son of the French Revolution; ideas, fancies, melodies and enthusiasms fermented in his ill-regulated brain, and he poured forth verses in a violent and endless stream.

It is difficult, from the sources of Scandinavian opinion, to obtain a sensible impression of Wergeland. The critics of Norway as persistently overrate his talents as those of Denmark neglect and ridicule his pretensions. The Norwegians still speak of him as *himmelstrævende sublim* ("sublime in his heavenly aspiration"); the Danes will have it that he was an hysterical poetaster. Neither view commends itself to a foreign reader of the poet.

The fact, internationally stated, seems rather to be this. In Wergeland we have a typical example of the effects of excess of fancy in a violently productive but essential uncritical nature. He was ecstatic, unmeasured, a reckless improvisatore. In his ideas he was preposterously humanitarian; a prodigious worker, his vigor of mind seemed never exhausted by his labors; in theory an idealist, in his private life he was charged with being scandalously sensual. He was so much the victim of his inspiration that it would come upon him like a descending wind, and leave him physically prostrate. In Wergeland we see an instance of the poetical temper in its most unbridled form. A glance through the enormous range of his collected works is like an excursion into chaos. We are met almost at the threshold by a colossal epic, *Creation, Man and the Messiah*

(1830); by songs that turn into dithyrambic odes, by descriptive pieces which embrace the universe, by all the froth and roar and turbidity of genius, with none of its purity and calm. The genius is there; it is idle to deny it; but it is in a state of violent turmoil.

It is when the ruling talent of an age is of the character of Wergeland's—

> Thundering and bursting,
> In torrents, in waves,
> Carolling and shouting
> Over tombs, over graves—

that delicate spirits, as in Matthew Arnold's poem, sigh for the silence and the hush, and rise at length in open rebellion against Iacchus and his mænads, who destroy all the quiet of life and who madden innocent blood with their riot. Johan Sebastian Welhaven (1807–73) was a student at the University with Wergeland, and he remained silent while the latter made the welkin ring louder and louder with his lyric shrieks. Welhaven endured the rationalist and republican rhetoric of Wergeland as long as he could, although with growing exasperation, until the rhapsodical author of *Creation*, transgressing all moderation, accused those who held reasonable views in literature and politics of being traitors. Then it became

necessary to deal with this raw and local parody of Victor Hugo. When, in the words of *The Cask of Amontillado*, Wergeland "ventured upon insult," Welhaven "vowed he would be avenged."

Welhaven formed as complete a contrast to his antagonist as could be imagined. He was of the class of Sully Prudhomme, of Matthew Arnold, of Lowell, to name three of his younger contemporaries. In his nature all was based upon equilibrium; his spirit, though full of graceful and philosophical intuitions, was critical rather than creative. He wrote little, and with difficulty, and in exquisite form. His life was as blamelessly correct as his literary art was harmonious. Wergeland knew nothing of the Danish tradition of his day, which he treated with violent and bitter contempt. Welhaven, who had moved in the circle of the friends of Rahbek, instinctively referred every literary problem to the tribunal of Danish taste. He saw that with the enthusiasm with which the poetry of Wergeland was received in Norway was connected a suspicion of mental discipline, a growing worship of the peasant and a hatred and scorn of Denmark, with all of which he had no sympathy. He thought the time had come for better things; that the national temper ought to be mollified with the

improved economic situation of the country; that the students, who were taking a more and more prominent place, ought to be on the side of the angels. It was not unnatural that Welhaven should look upon the corybantic music of Wergeland as the source and origin of an evil of which it was really the symptom; he gathered his powers together to crush it, and he published a thunderbolt of sonnets.

The English reader, familiar with the powerlessness of even the best verse to make any impression upon Anglo-Saxon opinion, may smile to think of a great moral and ethical attack conducted with no better weapon than a paper of sonnets. But the scene of the fight was a small, intensely local, easily agitated society of persons, all keenly though narrowly educated, and all accustomed to be addressed in verse. Welhaven's pamphlet was entitled *The Twilight of Norway* (1834), and the sonnets of which it consisted were highly polished in form, filled with direct and pointed references to familiar persons and events and absolutely unshrinking in attack. No poetry of equal excellence had been produced in Norway since the Union. It is not surprising that this invective against the tendencies of the youthful bard over whose rhapsodies all Norway was growing crazy with praise should arrest universal

attention, although in the *Twilight* Welhaven adroitly avoided mentioning Wergeland by name. Fanaticism gathered in an angry army around the outraged standard of the republican poet, but the lovers of order and discipline had found a voice, and they clustered about Welhaven with their support. Language was not minced by the assailants, and still less by the defenders. The lovers of Wergeland were told that politics and brandy were their only pleasures, but those of Welhaven were warned that they were known to be fed with bribes from Copenhagen. Meanwhile Welhaven himself, in successive publications, calmly analyzed the writings of his antagonist, and proved them to be "in complete rebellion against sound thought and the laws of beauty." The feud raged from 1834 to 1838, and left Norway divided into two rival camps of taste.

Although the "Twilight Feud" had passed away before Ibsen ceased to be a boy, the effect of it was too widely spread not to affect him. In point of fact, we see by the earliest of his lyric poems that while he was at Grimstad he had fully made up his mind. His early songs and complimentary pieces are all in the Danish taste, and if they show any native influence at all, it is that of Welhaven. The extreme superficiality of Wergeland would naturally be hateful to so arduous a

craftsman as Ibsen, and it is a fact that so far as his writings reveal his mind to us, the all-popular poet of his youth appears to be absolutely unknown to him. What this signifies may be realized if we say that it is as though a great English or French poet of the second half of the nineteenth century should seem to have never heard of Tennyson or Victor Hugo. On the other hand, at one crucial point of a late play, *Little Eyolf*, Ibsen actually pauses to quote Welhaven.

In critical history the absence of an influence is sometimes as significant as the presence of it. The looseness of Wergeland's style, its frothy abundance, its digressions and parentheses, its slipshod violence, would be to Ibsen so many beacons of warning, to be viewed with horror and alarm. A poem of three stanzas, "To the Poets of Norway," only recently printed, dates from his early months in Christiania, and shows that even in 1850 Ibsen was impatient with the conventional literature of his day. "Less about the glaciers and the pine-forests," he cries, "less about the dusty legends of the past, and more about what is going on in the silent hearts of your brethren!" Here already is sounded the note which was ultimately to distinguish him from all the previous writers of the North.

No letters have been published which throw

light on Ibsen's first two years in the capital. We know that he did not communicate with his parents, whose poverty was equalled by his own. He could receive no help from them, nor offer them any, and he refrained, as they refrained, from letter writing. This separation from his family, begun in this way, grew into a habit, so that when his father died in 1877 no word had passed between him and his son for nearly thirty years. When Ibsen reached Christiania, in March, 1850, his first act was to seek out his friend Schulerud, who was already a student. For some time he shared the room of Schulerud and his thrifty meals; later on the two friends, in company with Theodor Abildgaard, a young revolutionary journalist, lived in lodgings kept by a certain Mother Sæther.

Schulerud received a monthly allowance which was "not enough for one, and starvation for two"; but Ibsen's few dollars soon came to an end, and he seems to have lived on the kindness of Schulerud to their great mutual privation. Both young men attended the classes of a celebrated "crammer" of that day, H. A. S. Heltberg, who had opened in 1843 a Latin school where elder pupils came for a two-years' course to prepare them for taking their degree. This place, known familiarly as "the Student Factory," holds

quite a prominent place in Norwegian literary history, Ibsen, Björnson, Vinje and Jonas Lie having attended its classes and passed from it to the University.

Between these young men, the leading forces of literature in the coming age, a generous friendship sprang up, despite the disparity in their ages. Vinje, a peasant from Thelemark, was thirty-two; he had been a village schoolmaster and had only now, in 1850, contrived to reach the University. With Vinje, the founder of the movement for writing exclusively in Norwegian *patois*, Ibsen had a warm personal sympathy, while he gave no intellectual adherence to his theories. Between the births of Vinje and Björnson there stretched a period of fourteen years, yet Björnson was a student before either Ibsen or Vinje. That Ibsen immediately formed Björnson's acquaintance seems to be proved from the fact that they both signed a protest against the deportation of a Dane called Harring on May 29, 1850. It was a fortunate chance which threw Ibsen thus suddenly into the midst of a group of those in whom the hopes of the new generation were centred. But we are left largely to conjecture in what manner their acquaintanceship acted upon his mind.

His material life during the next year is obscure. Driven by the extremity of need, it is plain that

he adopted every means open to him by which he could add a few dollars to Schulerud's little store. He wrote for the poor and fugitive journals of the day, in prose and verse; but the payment of the Norwegian press in those days was almost nothing. It is difficult to know how he subsisted, yet he continued to exist. Although none of his letters of this period seem to have been preserved, a few landmarks are left us. The little play called *Kæmpehöien* (The Warrior's Barrow), which he had brought unfinished with him from Grimstad, was completed and put into shape in May, 1850, accepted at the Christiania Theatre, and acted three times during the following autumn. Perhaps the most interesting fact connected with this performance was that the only female part, that of Blanka, was taken by a young débutante, Laura Svendsen; this was the actress afterwards to rise to the height of eminence as the celebrated Mrs. Gundersen, no doubt the most gifted of all Ibsen's original interpreters.

It was a matter of course that the poet was greatly cheered by the acceptance of his play, and he immediately set to work on another, *Olaf Liljekrans;* but this he put aside when *Kæmpehöien* practically failed. He wrote a satirical comedy called *Norma.* He endeavored to get certain of his works, dramatic and lyric, published

in Christiania, but all the schemes fell through. It is certain that 1851 began darkly for the young man, and that his misfortunes encouraged in him a sour and rebellious temper. For the first and only time in his life he meddled with practical politics. Vinje and he—in company with a charming person, Paul Botten-Hansen (1824–69), who flits very pleasantly through the literary history of this time—founded a newspaper called *Andhrimner*, which lasted for nine months.

One of the contributors was Abildgaard, who, as we have seen, lived in the same house with Ibsen. He was a wild being, who had adopted the republican theories of the day in their crudest form. He posed as the head of a little body whose object was to dethrone the king, and to found a democracy in Norway. On July 7, 1851, the police made a raid upon these childish conspirators, the leaders being arrested and punished with a long imprisonment. The poet escaped, as by the skin of his teeth, and the warning was a lifelong one. He never meddled with politics any more. This was, indeed, as perhaps he felt, no time for rebellion; all over Europe the eruption of socialism had spent itself, and the docility of the populations had become wonderful.

The discomfort and uncertainty of Ibsen's position in Christiania made him glad to fill a post

which the violinist, Ole Bull, offered him during the autumn. The newly constituted National Theatre in Bergen (opened Jan. 2, 1850) had accepted a prologue written for an occasion by the young poet, and on November 6, 1851, Ibsen entered into a contract by which he bound himself to go to Bergen "to assist the theatre as dramatic author." The salary was less than £70 a year, but it was eked out by travelling grants, and little as it might be, it was substantially more than the nothing-at-all which Ibsen had been enjoying in Christiania.

It is difficult to imagine what asset could be brought to the treasuries of a public theatre by a youth of three and twenty so ill-educated, so empty of experience and so ill-read as Ibsen was in 1851. His crudity, we may be sure, passed belief. He was the novice who has not learned his business, the tyro to whom the elements of his occupation are unknown. We have seen that when he wrote *Catilina* he had neither sat through nor read any of the plays of the world, whether ancient or modern. The pieces which belong to his student years reveal a preoccupation with Danish dramas of the older school, Oehlenschläger and (if we may guess what *Norma* was) Holberg, but with nothing else. Yet Ole Bull, one of the most far-sighted men of his time, must

have perceived the germs of theatrical genius in him, and it is probable that Ibsen owed his appointment more to what this wise patron felt in his future than what Ole Bull or any one else could possibly point to as yet accomplished. Unquestionably, a rude theatrical penetration could already he divined in his talk about the stage, vague and empirical as that must have been.

At all events, to Bergen he went, as a sort of literary manager, as a Claretie or Antoine, to compare a small thing with great ones, and the fact was of inestimable value. It may even be held, without fear of paradox, that this was the turning-point of Ibsen's life, that this blind step in the dark, taken in the magnificent freedom of youth, was what made him what he became. No Bergen in 1851, we may say, and no *Doll's House* or *Hedda Gabler* ultimately to follow. For what it did was to force this stubborn genius, which might so easily have slipped into sinister and abnormal paths, and have missed the real humanity of the stage, to take the tastes of the vulgar into due consideration and to acquaint himself with the necessary laws of play-composition.

Ibsen may seem to have little relation with the drama of the world, but in reality he is linked with it at every step. There is something of Shakespeare in *John Gabriel Borkman*, something

of Molière in *Ghosts*, something of Goethe in *Peer Gynt*. We may go further and say, though it would have made Ibsen wince, that there is something of Scribe in *An Enemy of the People*. It is very doubtful whether, without the discipline which forced him to put on the stage, at Bergen and in Christiania, plays evidently unsympathetic to his own taste, which obliged him to do his best for the popular reception of those plays, and which forced him minutely to analyze their effects, he would ever have been the world-moving dramatist which, as all sane critics must admit, he at length became.

He made some mistakes at first; how could he fail to do so? It was the recognition of these blunders, and perhaps the rough censure of them in the local press, which induced the Bergen theatre to scrape a few dollars together and send him, in charge of some of the leading actors and actresses, to Copenhagen and Dresden for instruction. To go from Bergen to Copenhagen was like travelling from Abdera to Athens, and to find a species of Sophocles in J. A. Heiberg, who had since 1849 been sole manager of the Royal Theatre. Here the drama of the world, all the salutary names, all the fine traditions, burst upon the pilgrims from the North. Heiberg, the gracious and many-sided, was the centre of light in

those days; no one knew the stage as he knew it, no one interpreted it with such splendid intelligence, and he received the crude Norwegian "dramatist-manager" with the utmost elegance of cordiality. Among the teachers of Ibsen, Heiberg ranks as the foremost. We may go farther and say that he was the last. When Ibsen had learned the lesson of Heiberg, only nature and his own genius had anything more to teach him.[1] In August, 1852, rich with the spoils of time, but otherwise poor indeed, Ibsen made his way back to his duties in Bergen.

[1] Perhaps no author, during the whole of his career, more deeply impressed Ibsen with reverence and affection than Johan Ludvig Heiberg did. When the great Danish poet died (at Bonderup, August 25, 1860), Ibsen threw on his tomb the characteristic bunch of bitter herbs called *Til de genlevende*—"To the Survivors," in which he expressed the faintest appreciation of those who lavished posthumous honor on Heiberg in Denmark:

> In your land a torch he lifted;
> With its flame ye scorched his forehead.
>
> How to swing the sword he taught you,
> And,—ye plunged it in his bosom.
>
> While he routed trolls of darkness,—
> With your shields you tripped and bruised him.
>
> But his glittering star of conquest
> Ye must guard, since he has left you:
>
> Try, at least, to keep it shining,
> While the thorn-crowned conqueror slumbers.

CHAPTER III

LIFE IN BERGEN (1852-57)

IBSEN'S native biographers have not found much to record, and still less that deserves to be recorded, about his life during the next five years. He remained in Bergen, cramped by want of means in his material condition, and much harassed and worried by the little pressing requirements of the theatre. It seems that every responsibility fell upon his shoulders, and that there was no part of stage-life that it was not his duty to look after. The dresses of the actresses, the furniture, the scene-painting, the instruction of raw Norwegian actors and actresses, the selection of plays, now to please himself, now to please the *bourgeois* of Bergen, all this must be done by the poet or not done at all. Just so, two hundred years earlier, we may imagine Molière, at Carcassonne or Albi, bearing up in his arms, a weary Titan, all the frivolities and anxieties and misdeeds of a whole company of comedians.

So far as our very scanty evidence goes, we find the poet isolated from his fellows, so far as iso-

lation was possible, during his long stay at Bergen. He was not accused, and if there had been a chance he would have been accused, of dereliction. No doubt he pushed through the work of the theatre doggedly, but certainly not in a convivial spirit. The Norwegians are a hospitable and festal people, and there is no question that the manager of the theatre would have unusual opportunities of being jolly with his friends. But it does not appear that Ibsen made friends; if so, they were few, and they were as quiet as himself. Even in these early years he did not invite confidences, and no one found him wearing his heart upon his sleeve. He went through his work without effusion, and there is no doubt that what leisure he enjoyed he spent in study, mainly of dramatic literature.

His reading must have been limited by his insensibility to foreign languages. All through his life he forgot the tongues of other countries almost faster than he gained them. Probably, at this time, he had begun to know German, a language in which he did ultimately achieve a fluency which was, it appears, always ungrammatical. But, as is not unfrequent with a man who is fond of reading but no linguist, Ibsen's French and English came and went in a trembling uncertainty. As time passed on, he gave

up the effort to read, even a newspaper, in either language.

The mile-stones in this otherwise blank time are the original plays which, perhaps in accordance with some clause in his agreement, he produced at his theatre in the first week of January in each year. A list of them cannot be spared in this place to the most indolent of readers, since it offers, in a nutshell, a *résumé* of what the busy imagination of Ibsen was at work upon up to his thirtieth year. His earliest new-year's gift to the play-goers of Bergen was *St. John's Night*, 1853, a piece which has not been printed; in 1854 he revived *The Warrior's Barrow;* in 1855 he made an immense although irregular advance with *Lady Inger at Östraat;* in 1856 he produced *The Feast at Solhoug;* in 1857 a rewritten version of the early *Olaf Liljekrans*. These are the juvenile works of Ibsen, which are scarcely counted in the recognized canon of his writings. None of them is completely representative of his genius, and several are not yet within reach of the English reader. Yet they have a considerable importance, and must detain us for a while. They are remarkable as showing the vigor of the effort by which he attempted to create an independent style for himself, no less than the great difficulties which he encountered in following this admirable aim.

Lady Inger at Östraat, written in the winter of 1854 but not published until 1857, is unique among Ibsen's works as a romantic exercise in the manner of Scribe. It is the sole example of a theme taken by him directly from comparatively modern history, and treated purely for its value as a study of contemporary intrigue. From this point of view it curiously exemplifies a remark of Hazlitt: "The progress of manners and knowledge has an influence on the stage, and will in time perhaps destroy both tragedy and comedy. . . . At last, there will be nothing left, good nor bad, to be desired or dreaded, on the theatre or in real life."

When Ibsen undertook to write about Inger Gyldenlöve, he was but little acquainted with the particulars of her history. He conceived her, as he found her in the incomplete chronicles he consulted, as a Matriarch, a wonderful and heroic elderly woman around whom all the hopes of an embittered patriotism were legitimately centred. Unfortunately, "the progress of knowledge," as Hazlitt would say, exposed the falsity of this conception. A closer inspection of the documents, and further analysis of the condition of Norway in 1528, destroyed the fair illusion, and showed Ibsen in the light of an indulgent idealist.

Here is what Jæger[1] has to give us of the disconcerting results of research:

In real life Lady Inger was not a woman formed upon so grand a plan. She was the descendant of an old and noble family which had preserved its dignity, and she consequently was the wealthiest landowner in the country. This, and this alone, gives her a right to a place in history. If we study her life, we find no reason to suppose that patriotic considerations ever affected her conduct. The motive power of her actions was on a far lower plane, and seems to have consisted mainly in an amazingly strong instinct for adding to her wealth and her status. We find her, for instance, on one occasion seizing the estates of a neighbor, and holding them till she was actually forced to resign them. When she gave her daughters in marriage to Danish noblemen, it was to secure direct advantage from alliance with the most high-born sons-in-law procurable. When she took a convent under her protection, she contrived to extort a rent which well repaid her. Even for a good action she exacted a return, and when she offered harbor to the persecuted Chancellor, she had the adroitness to be well rewarded by a large sum in rose-nobles and Hungarian gulden.

All this could not fail to be highly exasperating to Ibsen, who had set out to be a realist, and was convicted by the spiteful hand of history of having been an idealist of the rose-water class. No wonder that he never touched the sequence of modern events any more.

[1] In *Et literært Livsbillede.*

There is some slight, but of course unconscious, resemblance to *Macbeth* in the external character of *Lady Inger*. This play has something of the roughness of a mediæval record, and it depicts a condition of life where barbarism uncouthly mingles with a certain luxury of condition. There is, however, this radical difference that in *Lady Inger* there is nothing preternatural, and it is, indeed, in this play that Ibsen seems first to appreciate the value of a stiff attention to realism. The romantic elements of the story, however, completely dominate his imagination, and when we have read the play carefully what remains with us most vividly is the picturesqueness and unity of the scene. The action, vehement and tumultuous as it is, takes place entirely within the walls of Östraat castle, a mysterious edifice, sombre and ancient, built on a crag over the ocean, and dimly lighted by

> Magic casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn.

The action is exclusively nocturnal, and so large a place in it is taken by huge and portable candlesticks that it might be called the Tragedy of the Candelabra. Through the windows, on the landward side, a procession of mysterious visitors go by in the moonlight, one by one, each

fraught with the solemnity of fate. The play is full of striking pictures, groups in light and shade, pictorial appeals to terror and pity.

The fault of the drama lies in the uncertain conception of the characters, and particularly of that of the Matriarch herself. Inger is described to us as the Mother of the Norwegian People, as the one strong, inflexible and implacable brain moving in a world of depressed and irritated men. "Now there is no knight left in our land," says Finn, but—and this is the point from which the play starts—there is Inger Gyldenlöve. We have approached the moment of crisis when the fortunes and the fates of Norway rest upon the firmness of this majestic woman. Inger is driven forward on the tide of circumstance, and, however she may ultimately fail, we demand evidence of her inherent greatness. This, however, we fail to receive, and partly, no doubt, because Ibsen was still distracted at the division of the ways.

Oehlenschläger, if he had attempted this theme, would have made no attempt after subtlety of character painting and still less after correctness of historic color. He would have given small shrift to Olaf Skaktavl, the psychological outlaw. But he would have drawn Inger, the Mother of her People, in majestic strokes, and we should have had a great simplicity, a noble outline with

none of the detail put in. Ibsen, already, cannot be satisfied with this; to him the detail is everything, and the result is a hopeless incongruity between the cartoon and the finished work.

Lady Inger, in Ibsen's play, fails to impress us with greatness. "The deed no less than the attempt confounds" her. She displays, from the opening scene, a weakness that is explicable, but excludes all evidence of her energy. The ascendency of Nils Lykke, over herself and over her singularly and unconvincingly modern daughter, Elima, in what does it consist? In a presentation of a purely physical attractiveness; Nils Lykke is simply a voluptuary, pursuing his good fortunes, with impudent ease, in the home of his ancestral enemies. In his hands, and not in his only, the majestic Inger is reduced from a queen to a pawn. All manhood, we are told, is dead in Norway; if this be so, then what a field is cleared where a heroine like Inger, not young and a victim to her passions, nor old and delivered to decrepit fears, may show us how a woman of intellect and force can take the place of man. Instead of this, one disguised and anonymous adventurer after another comes forth out of the night, and confuses her with pretensions and traps her with deceits against which her intellect protests but her will is powerless to contend.

Another feature in the conduct of *Lady Inger* betrays the ambitious but the inexperienced dramatist. No doubt a pious commentator can successfully unravel all the threads of the plot, but the spectator demands that a play should be clearly and easily intelligible. The audience, however, is sorely puzzled by the events of this awful third night after Martinmas, and resents the obscurity of all this intrigue by candlelight. Why do the various persons meet at Östraat? Who sends them? Whence do they come and whither do they go? To these questions, no doubt, an answer can be found, and it is partly given, and very awkwardly, by the incessant introduction of narrative. The confused and melodramatic scene in the banquet-hall between Nils Lykke and Skaktavl is of central importance, but what is it about? The business with Lucia's coffin is a kind of nightmare, in the taste of Webster or of Cyril Tourneur. All these shortcomings are slurred over by the enthusiastic critics of Scandinavia, yet they call for indulgence. The fact is that *Lady Inger* is a brilliant piece of romantic extravagance, which is extremely interesting in illuminating the evolution of Ibsen's genius, and particularly as showing him in the act of emancipating himself from Danish traditions, but which has little positive value as a drama.

The direct result of the failure of *Lady Inger*—for it did not please the play-goers of Bergen and but partly satisfied its author—was, however, to send him back, for the moment, more violently than ever to the Danish tradition. Any record of this interesting phase in Ibsen's career is, however, complicated by the fact that late in his life (in 1883) he did what was very unusual with him: he wrote a detailed account of the circumstances of his poetical work in 1855 and 1856. He denied, in short, that he had undergone any influence from the Danish poet whom he had been persistently accused of imitating, and he traced the movement of his mind to purely Norwegian sources. During the remainder of his lifetime, of course, this statement greatly confounded criticism, and there is still a danger of Ibsen's disclaimer being accepted for gospel. However, literary history must be built on the evidence before it, and the actual text of *The Feast at Solhoug* and of *Olaf Liljekrans* must be taken in spite of anything their author chose to say nearly thirty years afterwards. Great poets, without the least wish to mystify, often, in the cant phrase, "cover their tracks." Tennyson, in advanced years, denied that he had ever been influenced by Shelley or Keats. So Ibsen disclaimed any effect upon his style of the lyrical dramas of Hertz. But we

must appeal from the arrogance of old age to the actual works of youth.

Henrik Hertz (1798–1870) was the most exquisite, the most delicate, of the Danish writers of his age. He was deeply impressed with the importance of form in drama, and at the height of his powers he began to compose rhymed plays which were like old ballads put into dialogue. His comedy of *Cupid's Strokes of Genius* (1830) began a series of tragi-comedies which gradually deepened in passion and melody, till they culminated in two of the acknowledged masterpieces of the Danish stage, *Svend Dyring's House* (1837) and *King René's Daughter* (1845). The genius of Hertz was diametrically opposed to that of Ibsen; in all Europe there were not two authors less alike. Hertz would have pleased Kenelm Digby, and if that romantic being had read Danish, the poet of chivalry must have had a niche in *The Broad Stone of Honour*. Hertz's style is delicate to the verge of sweetness; his choice of words is fantastically exquisite, yet so apposite as to give an impression of the inevitable. He cares very little for psychological exactitude or truth of observation; but he is the very type of what we mean by a verbal artist.

Ibsen made acquaintance with the works, and possibly with the person, of Hertz, when he was

in Copenhagen in 1852. There can be no doubt whatever that, while he was anxiously questioning his own future, and conscious of crude faults in *Lady Inger*, he set himself, as a task, to write in the manner of Hertz. It is difficult to doubt that it was a deliberate exercise, and we see the results in *The Feast at Solhoug* and in *Olaf Liljekrans*. These two plays are in ballad-rhyme and prose, like Hertz's romantic dramas; there is the same determination to achieve the chivalric ideal; but the work is that of a disciple, not of a master. Where Hertz, with his singing-robes fluttering about him, dances without an ungraceful gesture through the elaborate and yet simple masque that he has set before him to perform, Ibsen has high and sudden flights of metrical writing, but breaks down surprisingly at awkward intervals, and displays a hopeless inconsistency between his own nature and the medium in which he is forcing himself to write. As a proof that the similarity between *The Feast at Solhoug* and *Svend Dyring's House* is accidental, it has been pointed out that Ibsen produced his own play on the Bergen stage in January, 1856, and revived Hertz's a month later. It might, surely, be more sensibly urged that this fact shows how much he was captivated by the charm of the Danish dramatist.

The sensible thing, in spite of Ibsen's late dis-

claimer, is to suppose that, in the consciousness of his crudity and inexperience as a writer, he voluntarily sat at the feet of the one great poet whom he felt had most to teach him. On the boards at Bergen, *The Feast at Solhoug* was a success, while *Olaf Liljekrans* was a failure; but neither incident could have meant very much to Ibsen, who, if there ever was a poet who lived in the future, was waiting and watching for the development of his own genius. Slowly, without precocity, without even that joy in strength of maturity which comes to most great writers before the age of thirty, he toiled on in a sort of vacuum. His youth was one of unusual darkness, because he had not merely poverty, isolation, citizenship of a remote and imperfectly civilized country to contend against, but because his critical sense was acute enough to teach him that he himself was still unripe, still unworthy of the fame that he thirsted for. He had not even the consolation which a proud confidence in themselves gives to the unappreciated young, for in his heart of hearts he knew that he had as yet done nothing which deserved the highest praise. But his imagination was expanding with a steady sureness, and the long years of his apprenticeship were drawing to a close.

Ibsen was now, like other young Norwegian

poets, and particularly Björnson, coming into the range of that wind of nationalistic inspiration which had begun to blow down from the mountains and to fill every valley with music. The Norwegians were discovering that they possessed a wonderful hidden treasure in their own ancient poetry and legend. It was a gentle, clerically minded poet—himself the son of a peasant—Jörgen Moe (1813–82), long afterwards Bishop of Christianssand, who, as far back as 1834, began to collect from peasants the folk-tales of Norway. The childlike innocence and playful humor of these stories were charming to the mind of Moe, who was fortunately joined by a stronger though less delicate spirit in the person of Peter Christian Asbjörnsen. Their earliest collection of folk-lore in collaboration appeared in 1841, but it was the full edition of 1856 which produced a national sensation, and doubtless awakened Ibsen in Bergen. Meanwhile, in 1853, M. B. Landstad had published the earliest of his collections of the *folkeviser*, or national songs, while L. M. Lindeman in the same years (1853–59) was publishing, in installments, the peasant melodies of Norway. Moreover, Ibsen, who read no Icelandic, was studying the ancient sagas in the faithful and vigorous paraphrase of Petersen, and all combined to determine him to make an ex-

Ibsen in Dresden, October, 1873.

periment in a purely national and archaistic direction.

Ibsen, whose practice is always better than his theory, has given rather a confused account of the circumstances that led to the composition of his next play, *The Vikings at Helgeland*. But it is clear that in looking through Petersen for a subject which would display, in broad and primitive forms, the clash of character in an ancient Norwegian family, he fell upon "Volsungasaga," and somewhat rashly responded to its vigorous appeal. He thought that in this particular episode, "the titanic conditions and occurrences of the 'Nibelungenlied'" and other pro-mediæval legends had "been reduced to human dimensions." He believed that to dramatize such a story would lift what he called "our national epic material" to a higher plane. There is one phrase in his essay which is very interesting, in the light it throws upon the object which the author had before him in writing *The Vikings at Helgeland*. He says clearly—and this was intended as a revolt against the tradition of Oehlenschläger—"it was not my aim to present our mythic world, but simply our life in primitive times." Brandes says of this departure that it is "indeed a new conquest, but, like so many conquests, associated with very extensive plundering."

In turning to an examination of *The Vikings*, the first point which demands notice is that Ibsen has gained a surprising mastery over the arts of theatrical writing since we met with him last. There is nothing of the lyrical triviality of the verse in *The Feast at Solhoug* about the trenchant prose of *The Vikings*, and the crepuscular dimness of *Lady Inger* is exchanged for a perfect lucidity and directness. Whatever we may think about the theatrical propriety of the conductor of the vikings, there is no question at all as to what it is they do and mean. Ibsen has gained, and for good, that master quality of translucent presentation without which all other stage gifts are shorn of their value. When we have, however, praised the limpidity of *The Vikings at Helgeland*, we have, in honesty, to make several reservations in our criticism of the author's choice of a subject. It is valuable to compare Ibsen's treatment of Icelandic family-saga with that of William Morris; let us say, in *The Lovers of Gudrun*. That enchanting little epic deals with an episode from one of the great Iceland narratives, and follows it much more closely than Ibsen's does. But we are conscious of a less painful effort and of a more human result. Morris does successfully what Ibsen unsuccessfully aimed at doing: he translates the heroic and half-

fabulous action into terms that are human and credible.

It was, moreover, an error of judgment on the part of the Norwegian playwright to make his tragedy a mosaic of effective bits borrowed hither and thither from the Sagas. Scandinavian bibliography has toiled to show his indebtedness to this tale and to that, and he has been accused of concealing his plagiarisms. But to say this is to miss the mark. A poet is at liberty to steal what he will, if only he builds his thefts up into a living structure of his own. For this purpose, however, it is practically found that, owing perhaps to the elastic consistency of individual human nature, it is safest to stick to one story, embroidering and developing it along its own essential lines.

There is great vigor, however, in many of the scenes in *The Vikings*. The appearance of Hiördis on the stage, in the opening act, marks, perhaps, the first occasion on which Ibsen had put forth his full strength as a playwright. This entrance of Hiördis ought to be extremely effective; in fact, we understand, it rarely is. The cause of this disappointment can easily be discovered. It is the misfortune of *The Vikings* that it is hardly to be acted by mortal men. Hiördis herself is superhuman; she has eaten the heart of a wolf, she claims direct descent from a

race of fighting giants. There is a grandeur about the conception of her form and character, but it is a grandeur which might well daunt a human actress. One can faintly imagine the part being played by Mrs. Siddons, with such an extremity of fierceness and terror that ladies and gentlemen would be carried out of the theatre in hysterics, as in the days of Byron. Where Hiördis insults her guests, and contrives the horrid murder of the boy Thorolf before their eyes, we have a stage-dilemma presented to us—either the actress must treat the scene inadequately, or else intolerably. *Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet*, and we shrink from Hiördis with a physical disgust. Her great hands and shrieking mouth are like Bellona's, and they smell of blood.

What is true of Hiördis is true in less degree of all the characters in *The Vikings*. They are "great beautiful half-witted men," as Mr. Chesterton would say:

> Our sea was dark with dreadful ships
> Full of strange spoil and fire,
> And hairy men, as strange as sin,
> With horrid heads, came wading in
> Through the long low sea-mire.

This is the other side of the picture; this is how Örnulf and his seven terrible sons must have

appeared to Kaare the peasant, and this is how, to tell the truth, they would in real life appear to us. The persons in *The Vikings at Helgeland* are so primitive that they scarcely appeal to our sense of reality. In spite of all the romantic color that the poet has lavished upon them, and the majestic sentiments which he has put into their mouths, we feel that the inhabitants of Helgeland must have regarded them as those of Surbiton regarded the beings who were shot down from Mars in Mr. Wells' blood-curdling story.

The Vikings at Helgeland is a work of extraordinary violence and agitation. The personages bark at one another like seals and roar like sea-lions; they "cry for blood, like beasts at night." Örnulf, the aged father of a grim and speechless clan, is sorely wounded at the beginning of the play, but it makes no difference to him; no one binds up his arm, but he talks, fights, travels as before. We may see here foreshadowed various features of Ibsen's more mannered work. Here is his favorite conventional tame man, since, among the shouting heroes, Gunnar whimpers like a Tesman. Here is Ibsen's favorite trick of unrequited self-sacrifice; it is Sigurd, in Gunnar's armor, who kills the mystical white bear, but it is Gunnar who reaps the advantage. It is only fair to say that there is more than this to applaud

in *The Vikings at Helgeland;* it moves on a consistent and high level of austere romantic beauty. Mr. William Archer, who admires the play more than any Scandinavian critic has done, justly draws attention to the nobility of Örnulf's entrance in the third act. Yet, on the whole, I confess myself unable to be surprised at the severity with which Heiberg judged *The Vikings* at its first appearance, a severity which must have wounded Ibsen to the quick.

The year 1857 was one of unsettlement in Ibsen's condition. The period for which he had undertaken to manage the theatre at Bergen had now come to a close, and he was not anxious to prolong it. He had had enough of Bergen, to which only one chain now bound him. Those who read the incidents of a poet's life into the pages of his works may gratify their tendency by seeing in the discussions between Dagny and Hiördis some echo of the thoughts which were occupying Ibsen's mind in relation to the married state. Since his death, the story has been told of his love-affair with a very young girl, Rikke Holst, who had attracted his notice by throwing a bunch of wild flowers in his face, and whom he followed and desired to marry. Her father had rejected the proposal with indignation. Ibsen had suffered considerably, but this was, after all, an

early and a very fugitive sentiment, which made no deep impression on his heart, although it seems to have always lingered in his memory.

There had followed a sentiment much deeper and much more emphatic. A charming, though fragmentary, set of verses, addressed in January, 1856, to Miss Susannah Thoresen, show that already for a long while he had come to regard this girl of twenty as "the young dreaming enigma," the possible solution of which interested him more than that of any other living problem. It was more than the conversation of a versifying lover which made Ibsen speak of Miss Thoresen's "blossoming child-soul" as the bourne of his ambitions. In his dark way, he was already violently in love with her.

The household of her father, Hans Conrad Thoresen, was the most cultivated in Bergen. He himself, the rector of Holy Cross, was a bookish, meditative man of no particular initiative, but he had married, as his third wife, Anna Maria Kragh, a Dane by birth, and for a long time, with the possible exception of Camilla Collett, Wergeland's sister, the most active woman of letters in Norway. Mrs. Thoresen was the step-mother of Susannah, the only child of her husband's second marriage. Between Magdalene Thoresen and Ibsen a strong friendship had sprung up, which

lasted to the end of their lives, and some of Ibsen's best letters are those written to his wife's stepmother. She worked hard for him at the Bergen theatre, translating plays from the French, and it was during Ibsen's management of the theatre that several of her own pieces were produced. Her prose stories, in connection with which her name lives in Norwegian literature, were not yet written; so long as Ibsen was at her side, her ideas seem to have been concentrated on the stage. Constant communication with this charming woman, only nine years his senior, and much his superior in conventional culture, must have been a school of refinement to the crude and powerful young poet. And now the wise Magdalene appeared to him in a new light, dedicating to him the best treasure of the family circle, the gay and yet mysterious Susannah.

While he was writing *The Vikings at Helgeland*, and courting Susannah Thoresen, Ibsen received what seemed a timely invitation to settle in Christiania as director of the Norwegian Theatre; he returned, thereupon, to the capital in the summer of 1857, after an absence of six years. Now began another period of six years more, these the most painful in Ibsen's life, when, as Halvorsen has said, he had to fight not merely for the existence of himself and his family, but for

the very existence of Norwegian poetry and the Norwegian stage. This struggle was an excessively distressing one. He had left Bergen crippled with debts, and his marriage (June 26, 1856) weighed him down with further responsibilities. The Norwegian Theatre at Christiania was a secondary house, ill-supported by its patrons, often tottering at the brink of bankruptcy, and so primitive was the situation of literature in the country that to attempt to live by poetry and drama was to court starvation. His slender salary was seldom paid, and never in full. The only published volume of Ibsen's which had (up to 1863) sold at all was *The Warriors*, by which he had made in all 227 specie dollars (or about £25).

The Christiania he had come to, however, was not that which he had left. In many directions it had developed rapidly. From an intellectual point of view, the labors of the nationalists had made themselves felt; the folk-lore of Landstad, Moe and Asbjörnsen had impressed young imaginations. In some of its forms the development was unpleasing and discouraging to Ibsen; the success of the blank-verse tragedies of Andreas Munch (*Salomon de Caus*, 1855; *Lord William Russell*, 1857) was, for instance, an irritating step in the wrong direction. The new-born school of prose fiction, with Björnson as its head (*Synnöve*

Solbakken, 1857; *Arne*, 1858), with Camilla Collett's *Prefect's Daughters*, 1855, as its herald; with Östgaard's sketches of peasant life and humors in the mountains (1852)—all this was a direct menace to the popularity of the national stage, offering an easy and alluring alternative for home-loving citizens. Was it certain that the classic Danish, which alone Ibsen cared to write, would continue to be the language of the cultivated classes in Norway? Here was Ivar Aasen (in 1853) showing that the irritating *landsmaal* could be used for prose and verse.

Wherever he turned Ibsen saw increased vitality, but in shapes that were either useless or antagonistic to himself, and all that was harsh and saturnine in his nature awakened. We see Ibsen, at this moment of his life, like Shakespeare in his darkest hour, "in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes," unappreciated and ready to doubt the reality of his own genius; and murmuring to himself:—

> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,
> Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope.
> With what I most enjoy contented least.

How little his greatness was perceived in the Christiania literary coteries may be gathered from

the little fact that the species of official anthology of *Modern Norwegian Poets*, published in 1859, though it netted the shallows of national song very closely, contained not a line by the author of the lovely lyrics in *The Feast at Solhoug*. It was at this low and miserable moment that Ibsen's talent suddenly took wings; he conceived, in the summer of 1858, what finally became, five years later, his first acknowledged masterpiece, and perhaps the most finished of all his writings, the sculptural tragedy of *The Pretenders*.

The Pretenders (*Kongsemnerne*, properly stuff from which Kings can be made) is the earliest of the plays of Ibsen in which the psychological interest is predominant, and in which there is no attempt to disguise the fact. Nothing that has since been written about this drama, the very perfection of which is baffling to criticism, has improved upon the impression which Georg Brandes received from it when he first read it forty years ago. The passage is classic, and deserves to be cited, if only as perhaps the very earliest instance in which the genius of Ibsen was rewarded by the analysis of a great critic. Brandes wrote (in 1867):—

What is it that *The Pretenders* treats of? Looked at simply, it is an old story. We all know the tale of Aladdin and Nureddin, the simple legend in the *Arabian Nights*, and

our great poet's [Oehlenschläger's] incomparable poem. In *The Pretenders* two figures again stand opposed to one another as the superior and the inferior being, an Aladdin and a Nureddin nature. It is towards this contrast that Ibsen has hitherto unconsciously directed his endeavors, just as Nature feels her way in her blind preliminary attempts to form her types. Håkon and Skule are pretenders to the same throne, scions of royalty out of whom a king may be made. But the first is the incarnation of fortune, victory, right and confidence; the second—the principal figure in the play, masterly in its truth and originality—is the brooder, a prey to inward struggle and endless distrust, brave and ambitious, with perhaps every qualification and claim to be king, but lacking the inexpressible, impalpable somewhat that would give a value to all the rest—the wonderful Lamp. "I am a king's arm," he says, "mayhap a king's brain as well; but Håkon is the whole king." "You have wisdom and courage, and all noble gifts of the mind," says Håkon to him; "you are born to stand nearest a king, but not to be a king yourself."

To a poet the achievements of his greatest contemporaries in their common art have all the importance of high deeds in statesmanship and war. It is, therefore, by no means extravagant to see in the noble emulation of the two dukes in *The Pretenders* some reflection of Ibsen's attitude to the youthful and brilliant Björnson. The luminous self-reliance, the ardor and confidence and good fortune of Björnson-Håkon could not but offer a violent contrast with the gloom and

hesitation, the sick revulsions of hope and final lack of conviction, of Ibsen-Skule. It was Björnson's "belt of strength," as it was Håkon's, that he had utter belief in himself, and with this his rival could not yet girdle himself. "The luckiest man is the greatest man," says Bishop Nicholas in the play, and Björnson seemed in these melancholy years as lucky as Ibsen was unlucky. But the Bishop's views were not wide enough, and the end was not yet.

CHAPTER IV

THE SATIRES (1857–67)

TEMPERAMENT and environment combined at the period we have now reached to turn Ibsen into a satirist. It was during his time of *Sturm und Drang*, from 1857 to 1864, that the harshest elements in his nature were awakened, and that he became one who loved to lash the follies of his age. With the advent of prosperity and recognition this phase melted away, leaving Ibsen without illusions and without much pity, but no longer the scourge of his fellow-citizens. Although *The Pretenders*, a work of dignified and polished aloofness, was not completed until 1863, it really belongs to the earlier and more experimental section of Ibsen's works, and is so completely the outcome and the apex of his national studies that it has seemed best to consider it with *The Vikings at Helgeland*, in spite of its immense advance upon that drama. But we must now go back a year, and take up an entirely new section which overlaps the old, namely, that of Ibsen's satires in dramatic rhyme.

With regard to the adoption of that form of

poetic art, a great difference existed between Norwegian and English taste, and this must be borne in mind. Almost exactly at the date when Ibsen was inditing the sharp couplets of his *Love's Comedy*, Tennyson, in *Sea Dreams*, was giving voice to the English abandonment of satire—which had been rampant in the generation of Byron—in the famous words:—

> I loathe it: he had never kindly heart,
> Nor ever cared to better his own kind,
> Who first wrote satire, with no pity in it.

What England repudiated, Norway comprehended, and in certain hands enjoyed. Polemical literature, if seldom of a high class, was abundant and was much appreciated. The masterpiece of modern Norwegian poetry was, still, the satiric cycle of Welhaven. In ordinary controversy, the tone was more scathing, the bludgeon was whirled more violently, than English taste at that period could endure. Those whom Ibsen designed to crush had not minced their own words. The press was violence itself, and was not tempered with justice; when the poet looked round he saw "afflicted virtue insolently stabbed with all manner of reproaches," as Dryden said.

Yet it was not an age of gross and open vices; manners were not flagitious, they were merely of

a nauseous insipidity. Ibsen, flown with anger as with wine, could find no outrageous offences to lash, and all he could invite the age to do was to laugh at certain conventions and to reconsider some prejudicated opinions. He had to be pungent, not openly ferocious; he had to be sarcastic and to treat the current code of morals as a jest. He found the society around him excessively distasteful to him, but there were no crying evils of a political or ethical kind to be stigmatized. What was open to him was what an old writer of our own defined as "a sharp, well-mannered way of laughing a folly out of countenance."

Unfortunately, the people laughed at will never consent to think the way well mannered, and Ibsen was bitterly blamed for "want of taste," that vaguest and most insidious of accusations. We are told that he began his enterprise in prose,[1] but found that too stiff and bald a medium for a satire on the social crudity of Norway. In writing satire, it is all-important that the form should be adequate, and at this time Ibsen had not reached the impeccable perfection of his later colloquial prose. He started *Love's Comedy*, therefore, anew, and he wrote it as a pamphlet in rhyme. It is not certain that he had any very definite idea of

[1] "*Svanhild:* a Comedy in three acts and in prose: 1860," is understood to exist still in manuscript.

the line which his attack should take. He was very poor, very sore, very uncomfortable, and he was easily convinced that the times were out of joint. Then he observed that if there was anything that the Norwegian upper classes prided themselves upon it was their conduct of betrothal and marriage. Plato had said that the familiarity of young persons before marriage prevented enmity and disappointment in later years, that it was useful to know the peculiarities of temperament beforehand, and so, being accustomed to them, to discount them. But Ibsen was not of this opinion, or rather, perhaps, he did not choose to be. The extremely slow and public method of betrothal in the North gave him his first opportunity.

It is with a song, in the original one of the most delicious of his lyrics, that he opens the campaign. To a miscellaneous party of Philistines circled around the tea-table, "all sober and all ——" the rebellious hero sings:—

In the sunny orchard-closes,
  While the warblers sing and swing,
Care not whether blustering Autumn
  Break the promises of Spring;
Rose and white the apple-blossom
  Hides you from the sultry sky;
Let it flutter, blown and scattered,
  On the meadow, by and by.

In the sexual struggle, that is to say, the lovers should not pause to consider the worldly advantages of their match, but should fly in secret to each other's arms. By the law of battle, the female should be snatched to the conqueror's saddle-bow, and ridden away with into the night, not subjected to the jokes and the good advice and the impertinent congratulations of the clan. Young Lochinvar does not wait to ask the counsel of the bride's cousins, nor to run the gantlet of her aunts; he fords the Esk river with her, where ford there is none. Ibsen is in favor of the *mariage de convenance*, which suppresses, without favor, the absurdity of love-matches. Above all, anything is better than the publicity, the meddling and long-drawn exposure of betrothal, which kills the fine delicacy of love, as birds are apt to break their own eggs if intruding hands have touched them.

This is the central point in *Love's Comedy*, but there is much beside this in its reckless satire on the "sanctities" of domestic life. The burden of monogamy is frivolously dealt with, and the impertinent poet touches with levity upon the question of the duration of marriage:

> With my living, with my singing,
> I will tear the hedges down!

Sweep the grass and heap the blossom!
Let it shrivel, pale and blown!
Throw the wicket wide! Sheep, cattle,
Let them browse among the best!
I broke off the flowers; what matter
Who may graze among the rest!

Love's Comedy is perhaps the most diverting of Ibsen's works; it is certainly the most impertinent. If there was one class in Norwegian society which was held to be above criticism it was the clerical. A prominent character in Ibsen's comedy is the Rev. Mr. Strawman, a gross, unctuous and uxorious priest, blameless and dull, upon whose inert body the arrows of satire converge. This was never forgotten and long was unforgiven. As late as 1866 the Storthing refused a grant to Ibsen definitely on the ground of the scandal caused by his sarcastic portrait of Pastor Strawman. But the gentler sex, to which every poet looks for an audience, was not less deeply outraged by the want of indulgence which he had shown for all forms of amorous sentiment, although Ibsen had really, through his satire on the methods of betrothal, risen to something like a philosophical examination of the essence of love itself.

To Brandes, who reproached him for not recording the history of ideal engagements, and who

remarked, "You know, there are sound potatoes and rotten potatoes in this world," Ibsen cynically replied, "I am afraid none of the sound ones have come under my notice"; and when Guldstad proves to the beautiful Svanhild the paramount importance of creature comforts, the last word of distrust in the sustaining power of love had been said. The popular impression of Ibsen as an "immoral" writer seems to be primarily founded on the paradox and fireworks of *Love's Comedy*.

Much might be forgiven to a man so wretched as Ibsen was in 1862, and more to a poet so lively, brilliant and audacious in spite of his misfortunes. These now gathered over his head and threatened to submerge him altogether. He was perhaps momentarily saved by the publication of *Terje Vigen*, which enjoyed a solid popularity. This is the principal and, indeed, almost the only instance in Ibsen's works of what the Northern critics call "epic," but what we less ambitiously know as the tale in verse. *Terje Vigen* will never be translated successfully into English, for it is written, with brilliant lightness and skill, in an adaptation of the Norwegian ballad-measure which it is impossible to reproduce with felicity in our language.

Among Ibsen's writings *Terje Vigen* is unique as a piece of pure sentimentality carried right

through without one divagation into irony or pungency. It is the story of a much-injured and revengeful Norse pilot, who, having the chance to drown his old enemies, Milord and Milady, saves them at the mute appeal of their blue-eyed English baby. *Terje Vigen* is a masterpiece of what we may define as the "dash-away-a-manly-tear" class of narrative. It is extremely well written and picturesque, but the wonder is that, of all people in the world, Ibsen should have written it.

His short lyric poems of this period betray much more clearly the real temper of the man. They are filled full and brimming over with longing and impatience, with painful passion and with hope deferred. It is in the strident lyrics Ibsen wrote between 1857 and 1863 that we can best read the record of his mind, and share its exasperations, and wonder at its elasticity. The series of sonnets *In a Picture Gallery* is a strangely violent confession of distrust in his own genius; the *Epistle to H. O. Blom* a candid admission of his more than distrust in the talent and honesty of others. It was the peculiarity and danger of Ibsen's position that he represented no one but himself. For instance, the liberty of many of the expressions in *Love's Comedy* led those who were beginning a movement in favor of the

emancipation of women to believe that Ibsen was in sympathy with them, but he was not. All through his life, although his luminous penetration into character led him to be scrupulously fair in his analysis of female character, he was never a genuine supporter of the extension of public responsibility to the sex. A little later (in 1869), when John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women* produced a sensation in Scandinavia, and met with many enthusiastic supporters, Ibsen coldly reserved his opinion. He was always an observer, always a clinical analyst at the bedside of society, never a prophet, never a propagandist.

His troubles gathered upon him. Neither theatre consented to act *Love's Comedy*, and it would not even have been printed but for the zeal of the young novelist Jonas Lie, who, to his great honor, bought for about £35 the right to publish it as a supplement to a newspaper that he was editing. Then the storm broke out; the press was unanimously adverse, and in private circles abuse amounted almost to a social taboo. In 1862 the second theatre became bankrupt, and Ibsen was thrown on the world, the most unpopular man of his day, and crippled with debts. It is true that he was engaged at the Christiania Theatre at a nominal salary of about a pound a week, but he could not live on that. In August,

1860, he had made a pathetic appeal to the Government for a *digter-gage*, a payment to a poet, such as is freely given to talent in the Northern countries. Sums were voted to Björnson and Vinje, but to Ibsen not a penny. By some influence, however, for he was not without friends, he was granted in March, 1862, a travelling grant of less than £20 to enable him to wander for two months in western Hardanger and the districts around the Sognefjord for the purpose of collecting folk-songs and legends. The results of this journey were prepared for publication, but never appeared. This interesting excursion, however, has left its mark stamped broadly upon *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*.

All through 1863 his condition was critical. He determined that his only hope was to exile himself definitely from Norway, which had become too hot to hold him. Various private friends generously helped him over this dreadful time of adversity, earning a gratitude which, if it was not expansive, was lifelong. Very grudging recognition of his gifts was at length made by the Government in the shape of another trifling travelling grant (March, 1863), again a handsome sum being awarded to Björnson, his popular rival. In May Ibsen applied, in despair, to the King himself, who conferred upon him a

small pension of £90 a year, which for the immediate future stood between this great poet and starvation. The news of it was received in Christiania by the press in terms of despicable insult.

But in June of this *année terrible* Ibsen had a flash of happiness. He was invited down to Bergen to the fifth great "Festival of Song," a national occurrence, and he and his poems met with a warm reception. Moreover, he found his brilliant antagonist, Björnson, at Bergen on a like errand, and renewed an old friendship with this warm-hearted and powerful man of genius, destined to play through life the part of Håkon to Ibsen's Skule. They spent much of the subsequent winter together. As Halvdan Koht has excellently said: "Their intercourse brought them closer to each other than they had ever been before. They felt that they were inspired by the same ideas and the same hopes, and they suffered the same bitter disappointments. With anguish they watched the Danish brother-nation's desperate struggle against the superior power of Germany, and saw a province with a population of Scandinavian race and speech taken from Denmark and incorporated in a foreign kingdom, whilst the Norwegian and Swedish kinsmen, in spite of solemn promises, refrained from yielding

From a drawing by Gustav Laerum.

any assistance." An attack on Holstein (December 22, 1863) had introduced the Second Danish War, to which a disastrous and humiliating termination was brought in the following August.

In April, 1864, Ibsen took the momentous step of quitting his native country. He entered Copenhagen at the dark hour when Schleswig as well as Holstein had been abandoned, and when the citadel of Düppel alone stood between Denmark and ruin. His agonized sympathy may be read in the indignant lyrics of that spring. A fortnight later he set out, by Lübeck and Trieste, for Rome, where he had now determined to reside. He reached that city in due time, and sank with ineffable satisfaction into the arms of its antique repose. "Here at last," he wrote to Björnson, "there is blessed peace," and he settled himself down to the close contemplation of poetry.

The change from the severities of an interminable Northern winter to the glow and splendor of Italy acted on the poet's spirit like an enchantment. Ibsen came, another Pilgrim of Eternity, to Rome's "azure sky, flowers, ruins, statues, music," and at first the contrast between the crudity he had left and the glory he had found was almost intolerable. He could not work; all he did was to lie in the flushed air and become as a little child. There has scarcely been

another example of a writer of the first class who, deeply solicitous about beauty, but debarred from all enjoyment of it until his thirty-seventh year, has been suddenly dipped, as if into a magic fountain, into the heart of unclouded loveliness without transition or preparation. Shelley and Keats were dead long before they reached the age at which Ibsen broke free from his prison-house of ice, while Byron, in the same year of his life, was closing his romantic career.

Ibsen's earliest impressions of what these poets had become accustomed to at a ductile age were contradictory and even incoherent. The passion of pagan antiquity for a long while bewildered him. He wandered among the vestiges of antique art, unable to perceive their relation to modern life, or their original significance. He missed the impress of the individual on classic sculpture, as he had missed it—the parallel is strange, but his own—on the Eddaic poems of ancient Iceland. He liked a lyric or a statue to speak to him of the man who made it. He felt more at home with Bernini among sculptors and with Bramante among architects than with artists of a more archaic type. Shelley, we may remember, labored under a similar heresy; to each of these poets the attractiveness of individual character overpowered the languid flavor of the age in which the artist had

flourished. Ibsen's admiration of a certain over-praised monument of Italian architecture would not be worth recording but for the odd vigor with which he adds that the man who made that might have made the moon in his leisure moments.

During the first few months of Ibsen's life in Rome all was chaos in his mind. He was plunged in stupefaction at the beauties of nature, the amenities of mankind, the interpenetration of such a life with such an art as he had never dreamed of and could yet but dimly comprehend. In September, 1864, he tells Björnson that he is at work on a poem of considerable length. This must have been the first draft of *Brand*, which was begun, we know, as a narrative, or as the Northerns call it, an "epic" poem; although a sketch for the *Julianus Apostata* was already forming in the back of his head, as a subject which would, sooner or later, demand poetic treatment. He had left his wife and little son in Copenhagen, but at the beginning of October they joined him in Rome. The family lived on an income which seems almost incredibly small, a maximum of 40 scudi a month. But it was a different thing to be hungry in Christiania and in Rome, and Ibsen makes no complaints. A sort of blessed languor had fallen upon him after all his afflictions. He would loll through half his days

among the tombs on the Via Latina, or would loiter for hours and hours along the Appian Way. It took him weeks to summon energy to visit S. Pietro in Vincoli, although he knew that Michelangelo's "Moses" was there, and though he was weary with longing to see it. All the tense chords of Ibsen's nature were loosened. His soul was recovering, through a long and blissful convalescence, from the aching maladies of its youth.

He took some part in the society of those Scandinavian writers, painters and sculptors who gathered in Rome through the years of their distress. But only one of them attracted him strongly, the young Swedish lyrical poet, Count Carl Snoilsky, then the hope and already even the glory of his country. There was some quaint diversity between the rude and gloomy Norwegian dramatist, already middle-aged, and the full-blooded, sparkling Swedish diplomatist of twenty-three, rich, flattered, and already as famous for his fashionable *bonnes fortunes* as Byron. But two things Snoilsky and Ibsen had in common, a passionate enthusiasm for their art, and a rebellious attitude towards their immediate precursors in it. Each, in his own way, was the leader of a new school. The friendship of Ibsen and Snoilsky was a permanent condition for the rest of their lives, for it was founded on a common basis.

A few years later the writer of these pages received an amusing impression of Ibsen at this period from the Danish poet, Christian Molbech, who was also in Rome in 1865 and onwards. Ibsen wandering silently about the streets, his hands plunged far into the pockets of his invariable jacket of faded velveteen, Ibsen killing conversation by his sudden moody appearances at the Scandinavian Club, Ibsen shattering the ideals of the painters and the enthusiasms of the antiquaries by a running fire of sarcastic paradox, this is mainly what the somewhat unsympathetic Molbech was not unwilling to reproduce. He painted a more agreeable Ibsen when he spoke of his summer flights to the Alban Hills, planned on terms of the most prudent reference to resources which seemed ever to be expected and never to arrive. Nevertheless, under the vines in front of some inn at Genzano or Albano, Ibsen would duly be discovered, placid and dreamy, always self-sufficient and self-contained, but not unwilling to exchange, over a flask of thin wine, commonplaces with a Danish friend. It was at Ariccia, in one of these periods of *villegiatura*, during the summer and autumn of 1865, that *Brand*, which had long been under considerature, suddenly took final shape, and was written throughout, without pause or hesitation. In July the poet put every-

thing else aside to begin it, and before the end of September he had completed it.

Brand placed Ibsen at a bound among the greatest European poets of his age. The advance over the sculptural perfection of *The Pretenders* and the graceful wit of *Love's Comedy* was so great as to be startling. Nothing but the veil of a foreign language, which the best translations are powerless to tear away from noble verse, prevented this mastery from being perceived at once. In Scandinavia, where that veil did not exist, for those who had eyes to see, and who were not blinded by prejudice, it was plain that a very great writer had arisen in Norway at last. Björnson had seemed to slip ahead of Ibsen; his *Sigurd Slembe* (1862) was a riper work than the elder friend had produced; but *Mary Stuart in Scotland* (1864) had marked a step backward, and now Ibsen had once more shot far ahead of his rival. When we have admitted some want of clearness in the symbolism which runs through *Brand*, and some shifting of the point of view in the two last acts, an incoherency and a turbidity which are natural in the treatment of so colossal a theme, there is very little but praise to be given to a poem which is as manifold in its emotion and as melodious in its versification as it is surprising in its unchallenged originality. In the literatures of

Scandinavia it has not merely been unsurpassed, but in its own peculiar province it has not been approached. It bears some remote likeness to *Faust*, but with that exception there is perhaps nothing in the literature of the world which can be likened to *Brand*, except, of course, *Peer Gynt*.

For a long while it was supposed that the difficulties in the way of performing *Brand* on the public stage were too great to be overcome. But the task was attempted at length, first in Stockholm in 1895; and within the last few years this majestic spectacle has been drawn in full before the eyes of enraptured audiences in Copenhagen, Berlin, Moscow and elsewhere. In spite of the timid reluctance of managers, wherever this play is adequately presented, it captures an emotional public at a run. It is an appeal against moral apathy which arouses the languid. It is a clear and full embodiment of the gospel of energy which awakens and upbraids the weak. In the original, its rush of rhymes produces on the nerves an almost delirious excitement. If it is taken as an oration, it is responded to as a great civic appeal; if as a sermon, it is sternly religious, and fills the heart with tears. In the solemn mountain air, with vague bells ringing high up among the glaciers, no one asks exactly what *Brand* expounds, nor whether it is perfectly coherent.

Witnessed on the living stage, it takes the citadel of the soul by storm. When it is read, the critical judgment becomes cooler.

Carefully examined, *Brand* is found to present a disconcerting mixture of realism and mysticism. Two men seem at work in the writing of it, and their effects are sometimes contradictory. It has constantly been asked, and it was asked at once, "Is *Brand* the expression of Ibsen's own nature?" Yes, and no. He threw much of himself into his hero, and yet he was careful to remain outside. Ibsen, as we have already pointed out, was ready in later life to discuss his own writings, and what he said about them is often dangerously mystifying. He told Georg Brandes that the religious vocation of *Brand* was not essential. "I could have applied the whole syllogism just as well to a sculptor, or a politician, as to a priest." (He was to deal with each of these alternations later on, but with what a difference!) "I could quite as well," he persisted, "have worked out the impulse which drove me to write, by taking Galileo, for instance, as my hero—assuming, of course, that Galileo should stand firm and never concede the fixity of the earth—or you yourself in your struggle with the Danish reactionaries." This is not to the point, since in fact neither Georg Brandes nor Galileo, as hero of a mystical drama,

could have produced such a capacity for evolution as is presented by the stern priest whose absolute certitude, although founded, one admits, on no rational theory of theology, is yet of the very essence of religion.

Brand becomes intelligible when we regard him as a character of the twelfth century transferred to the nineteenth. He has something of Peter the Hermit in him. He ought to have been a crusading Christian king, fighting against the Moslem for the liberties of some sparkling city of God. He exists in his personage, under the precipice, above the fjord, like a rude mediæval anchorite, who eats his locusts and wild honey in the desert. We cannot comprehend the action of Brand by any reference to accepted creeds and codes, because he is so remote from the religious conventions as hardly to seem objectively pious at all. He is violent and incoherent; he knows not clearly what it is he wants, but it must be an upheaval of all that exists, and it must bring Man into closer contact with God. Brand is a king of souls, but his royal dignity is marred, and is brought sometimes within an inch of the ridiculous, by the prosaic nature of his modern surroundings. He is harsh and cruel; he is liable to fits of anger before which the whole world trembles; and it is by an avalanche, brought

down upon him by his own wrath, that he is finally buried in the ruins of the Ice-Church.

The judicious reader may like to compare the character of Brand with that extraordinary study of violence, the *Abbé Jules* of Octave Mirbeau. In each we have the history of revolt, in a succession of crises, against an invincible vocation. In each an element of weakness is the pride of a peasant priest. But in Ibsen there is fully developed what the cynicism of Octave Mirbeau avoids, a genuine conception of such a rebel's ceaseless effort after personal holiness. Lammers or Lammenais, what can it matter whether some existing priest of insurrection did or did not set Ibsen for a moment on the track of his colossal imagination? We may leave these discussions to the commentators; *Brand* is one of the great poems of the world, and endless generations of critics will investigate its purpose and analyze its forms.

There is, however, another than the priestly side. The poem contains a great deal of superficial and rather ephemeral satire of contemporary Scandinavian life, echoes of a frightened Storthing in Christiania, of a crafty court in Stockholm, and of Denmark stretching her bleeding hands to her sisters in an agony of despair. There is the still slighter local strain of irony, which lightens the middle of the third act. Here Ibsen comes not

to heal but to slay; he exposes the corpse of an exhausted age, and will bury it quickly, with sexton's songs and peals of elfin laughter, in some chasm of rock above a waterfall. "It is Will alone that matters," and for the weak of purpose there is nothing but ridicule and six feet of such waste earth as nature carelessly can spare from her rude store of graves. Against the mountain landscape, Brand holds up his motto "All or Nothing," persistently, almost tiresomely, like a modern advertising agent affronting the scenery with his panacea. More truculently still, he insists upon the worship of a deity, not white-bearded, but as young as Hercules, a scandal to prudent Lutheran theologians, a prototype of violent strength.

Yet Brand's own mission remains undefined to him—if it ever takes exact shape—until Agnes reveals it to him:—

> Choose thy endless loss or gain!
> Do thy work and bear thy pain. . . .
> Now (he answers) I see my way aright.
> In *ourselves* is that young Earth,
> Ripe for the divine new-birth.

And it is in Agnes—as the marvellous fourth act opens where her love for the little dear dead child is revealed, and where her patience endures all the

cruelties of her husband's fanaticism—it is in Agnes that Ibsen's genius for the first time utters the clear, unembittered note of full humanity. He has ceased now to be parochial; he is a nursling of the World and Time. If the harsh Priest be, in a measure, Ibsen as Norway made him, Agnes and Einar, and perhaps Gerd also, are the delicate offspring of Italy.

Considerable postponements delayed the publication of *Brand*, which saw the light at length, in Copenhagen, in March, 1866. It was at once welcomed by the Danish press, which had hitherto known little of Ibsen, and the poet's audience was thus very considerably widened. The satire of the poem awakened an eager polemic; the popular priest Wexels preached against its tendency. A novel was published, called *The Daughters of Brand*, in which the results of its teaching were analyzed. Ibsen enjoyed, what he had never experienced before, the light and shade of a disputed but durable popular success. Four large editions of *Brand* were exhausted within the year of its publication, and it took its place, of course, in more leisurely progress, among the few books which continued, and still continue, steadily to sell. It has always been, in the countries of Scandinavia, the best known and the most popular of all Ibsen's writings.

This success, however, was largely one of sentiment, not of pecuniary fortune. The total income from four editions of a poem like *Brand*, in the conditions of Northern literary life forty years ago, would not much exceed £100. Hardly had Ibsen become the object of universal discussion than he found himself assailed, as never before, by the paralysis of poverty. He could not breathe, he could not move; he could not afford to buy postage stamps to stick upon his business letters. He was threatened with the absolute extinction of his resources. At the very time when Copenhagen was ringing with his praise Ibsen was borrowing money for his modest food and rent from the Danish Consul in Rome.

In the winter of 1865 he fell into a highly nervous condition, in the midst of which he was assailed by a malarious fever which brought him within sight of the grave. To the agony of his devoted wife, he lay for some time between life and death, and the extreme poverty from which they suffered made it difficult, and even impossible, for her to provide for him the alleviations which his state demanded. He gradually recovered, however, thanks to his wife's care and to his own magnificent constitution, but the springs of courage seemed to have snapped within his breast.

In March, 1866, worn out with illness, poverty and suspense, he wrote a letter to Björnson, "my one and only friend," which is one of the most heart-rending documents in the history of literature. Few great spirits have been nearer the extinction of despair than Ibsen was, now in his thirty-ninth year. His admirers, at their wits' end to know what to advise, urged him to write directly to Carl, King of Sweden and Norway, describing his condition, and asking for support. Simultaneously came the manifest success of *Brand*, and, for the first time, the Norwegian press recognized the poet's merit. There was a general movement in his favor; King Carl graciously received his petition of April 15, and on May 10 the Storthing, almost unanimously, voted Ibsen a "poet's pension," restricted in amount but sufficient for his modest needs.

The first use he made of his freedom was to move out of Rome, where he found it impossible to write, and to settle at Frascati among the hills. He hired a nest of cheap rooms in the Palazzo Gratiosi, two thousand feet above the sea. Thither he came, with his wife and his little son, and there he fitted himself up a study; setting his writing-table at a window that overlooked an immensity of country, and Mont Soracté closing the horizon with its fiery pyramid. In his cor-

respondence of this time there are suddenly noticeable a gayety and an insouciance which are elements wholly new in his letters. The dreadful burden was lifted; the dreadful fear of sinking in a sea of troubles and being lost for ever, the fear which animates his painful letter to King Carl, was blown away like a cloud and the heaven of his temper was serene. At Frascati he knew not what to be at; he tried that subject, and this, waiting for the heavenly spark to fall. It seems to have been at Tusculum, and in the autumn of 1866, that the subject he was looking for descended upon him. He hurried back to Rome, and putting all other schemes aside, he devoted himself heart and soul to the composition of *Peer Gynt*, which he described as to be "a long dramatic poem, having as its chief figure one of the half-mythical and fantastical personages from the peasant life of *modern* Norway."

He wrote this work slowly, more slowly than was his wont, and it was a whole year on the stocks. It was in the summer that Ibsen habitually composed with the greatest ease, and *Peer Gynt* did not move smoothly until the poet settled in the Villa Pisani, at Casamicciola, on the island of Ischia. His own account was: "After *Brand* came *Peer Gynt*, as though of itself. It was written in Southern Italy, in Ischia and at Sor-

rento. So far away from one's readers one becomes reckless. This poem contains much that has its origin in the circumstances of my own youth. My own mother—with the necessary exaggeration—served as the model for Ase." *Peer Gynt* was finished before Ibsen left Sorrento at the end of the autumn, and the MS. was immediately posted to Copenhagen. None of the delays which had interfered with the appearance of *Brand* now afflicted the temper of the poet, and *Peer Gynt* was published in November, 1867.

In spite of the plain speaking of Ibsen himself, who declared that *Peer Gynt* was diametrically opposed in spirit to *Brand*, and that it made no direct attack upon social questions, the critics of the later poem have too often persisted in darkening it with their educational pedantries. Ibsen did well to be angry with his commentators. "They have discovered," he said, "much more satire in *Peer Gynt* than was intended by me. Why can they not read the book as a poem? For as such I wrote it." It has been, however, the misfortune of Ibsen that he has particularly attracted the attention of those who prefer to see anything in a poem except its poetry, and who treat all tulips and roses as if they were cabbages for the pot of didactic morality. Yet it is surprising that after all that the author said, and

with the lovely poem shaking the bauble of its fool's-cap at them, there can still be commentators who see nothing in *Peer Gynt* but the "awful interest of the universal problems with which it deals." This obsession of the critic to discover "problems" in the works of Ibsen has been one of the main causes of that impatience and even downright injustice with which his writings have been received by a large section of those readers who should naturally have enjoyed them. He is a poet, of fantastic wit and often reckless imagination, and he has been travestied in a long black coat and white choker, as though he were an embodiment of the Nonconformist conscience.

Casting aside, therefore, the spurious "lessons" and supposititious "problems" of this merry and mundane drama, we may recognize among its irregularities and audacities two main qualities of merit. Above everything else which we see in *Peer Gynt* we see its fun and its picturesqueness. Written at different times and in different moods, there is an incoherency in its construction which its most whole-hearted admirers cannot explain away. The first act is an inimitable burst of lyrical high spirits, tottering on the verge of absurdity, carried along its hilarious career with no less peril and with no less brilliant success than

Peer fables for himself and the reindeer in their ride along the vertiginous blade of the Gjende. In the second act, satire and fantasy become absolutely unbridled; the poet's genius sings and dances under him, like a strong ship in a storm, but the vessel is rudderless and the pilot an emphatic libertine. The wild impertinence of fancy, in this act, from the moment when Peer and the Girl in the Green Gown ride off upon the porker, down to the fight with the Böig, gigantic gelatinous symbol of self-deception, exceeds in recklessness anything else written since the second part of *Faust*. The third act, culminating with the drive to Soria Moria Castle and the death of Ase, is of the very quintessence of poetry, and puts Ibsen in the first rank of creators. In the fourth act, the introduction of which is abrupt and grotesque, we pass to a totally different and, I think, a lower order of imagination. The fifth act, an amalgam of what is worst and best in the poem, often seems divided from it in tone, style and direction, and is more like a symbolic or mythical gloss upon the first three acts than a contribution to the growth of the general story.

Throughout this tangled and variegated scene the spirits of the author remain almost preposterously high. If it were all hilarity and sardonic laughter, we should weary of the strain.

But physical beauty of the most enchanting order is liberally provided to temper the excess of irony. It is, I think, no exaggeration to say that nowhere in the dramatic literature of the world, not by Shakespeare himself, is there introduced into a play so much loveliness of scenery, and such varied and exquisite appeal to the eyes, as there is in *Peer Gynt*. The fifth act contains much which the reader can hardly enjoy, but it opens with a scene so full of the glory of the mountains and the sea that I know nothing else in drama to compare with it. This again is followed by one of the finest shipwrecks in all poetry. Scene after scene, the first act portrays the cold and solemn beauty of Norwegian scenery as no painter's brush has contrived to do it. For the woodland background of the Sæter Girls there is no parallel in plastic art but the most classic of Norwegian paintings, Dahl's "Birch in a Snow Storm." Pages might be filled with praise of the picturesqueness of tableau after tableau in each act of *Peer Gynt*.

The hero is the apotheosis of selfish vanity, and he is presented to us, somewhat indecisively, as the type of one who sets at defiance his own life's design. But is Peer Gynt designed to be a useful, a good, or even a successful man? Certainly Ibsen had not discovered it when he wrote the

first act, in which scarcely anything is observable except a study, full of merriment and sarcasm, of the sly, lazy and parasitical class of peasant rogue. This type was not of Ibsen's invention; he found it in those rustic tales, inimitably resumed by Asbjörnson and Moe, in which he shows us that his memory was steeped. Here, too, he found the Böig, a monster of Norse superstition, vast and cold, slippery and invisible, capable of infinite contraction and expansion. The conception that this horror would stand in symbol for a certain development of selfish national instability seems to have seized him later, and *Peer Gynt*, which began as a farce, continued as a fable. The nearest approach to a justification of the moral or "problem" purpose, which Ibsen's graver prophets attribute to him, is found in the sixth scene of the fifth act, where, quite in the manner of Goethe, thoughts and watchwords and songs and tears take corporeal form and assail the aged *Peer Gynt* with their reproaches.

Peer Gynt was received in the North with some critical bewilderment, and it has never been so great a favorite with the general public as *Brand*. But Ibsen, with triumphant arrogance, when he was told that it did not conform to the rules of poetic art, asserted that the rules must be altered,

not *Peer Gynt*. "My book," he wrote, "*is* poetry, and if it is not, then it shall be. The Norwegian conception of what poetry is shall be made to fit my book." There was a struggle at first against this assumption, but the drama has become a classic, and it is now generally allowed, that so long as poetry is a term wide enough to include *The Clouds* and the Second Part of *Faust*, it must be made wide enough to take in a poem as unique as they are in its majestic intellectual caprices.

Note.—By far the most exhaustive analysis of *Peer Gynt* which has hitherto been given to the world is that published, as I send these pages to the press, by the executors of Otto Weininger, in his posthumous *Ueber die letzte Dinge* (1907). This extraordinary young man, who shot himself on October 4, 1903, in the house at Vienna where Beethoven died, was only twenty-three years of age when he violently deprived philosophical literature in Europe of by far its most promising and remarkable recruit. If I confess myself unable to see in *Peer Gynt* all that Weininger saw in it, the fault is doubtless mine. But in Ibsen, unquestionably, time will *create* profundities, as it has in Shakespeare. The greatest works grow in importance, as trees do after the death of the mortal men who planted them.

CHAPTER V

1868–75

IBSEN'S four years in Italy were years of rest, of solitude, of calm. The attitude of Ibsen to Italy was totally distinct from that of other illustrious exiles of his day and generation. The line of pilgrims from Stendhal and Lamartine down to Ruskin and the Brownings had brought with them a personal interest in Italian affairs; Italian servitude had roused some of them to anger or irony; they had spent nights of insomnia dreaming of Italian liberty. *Casa Guidi Windows* may be taken as the extreme type of the way in which Italy did not impress Ibsen. He sought there, and found, under the transparent azure of the Alban sky, in the harmonious murmurs of the sea, in the violet shadows of the mountains, above all in the gray streets of Rome, that rest of the brain, that ripening of the spiritual faculties, which he needed most after his rough and prolonged adolescence in Norway. In his attitude of passive appreciation he was, perhaps,

more like Landor than like any other of the illustrious exiles—Landor, who died in Florence a few days after Ibsen settled in Rome. There was a side of character, too, on which the young Norwegian resembled that fighting man of genius.

When, therefore, on September 8, 1867, Garibaldi, at Genoa, announced his intention of marching upon Rome, an echo woke in many a poet's heart "by rose-hung river and light-foot rill," but left Ibsen simply disconcerted. If Rome was to be freed from Papal slavery, it would no longer be the somnolent and unupbraiding haunt of quietness which the Norwegian desired for the healing of his spleen and his moral hypochondria. In October the heralds of liberty crossed the Papal frontier; on the 30th, by a slightly prosaic touch, it was the French who entered Rome. Of Ibsen, in these last months of his disturbed sojourn—for he soon determined that if there was going to be civil war in Italy that country was no home for him—we hear but little. This autumn, however, we find him increasingly observant of the career of Georg Brandes, the brilliant and revolutionary Danish critic, in whom he was later on to find his first great interpreter. And we notice the beginnings of a difference with Björnson, lamentable and hardly explicable, starting, it would vaguely seem, out of a sense that Björnson did not

appreciate the poetry of *Peer Gynt* at its due value. Clemens Petersen, who, since the decease of Heiberg, had been looked upon as the *doyen* of Danish critics—had pronounced against the poetry of *Peer Gynt*, and Ibsen, in one of his worst moods, in a bearish letter, had thrown the blame of this judgment upon Björnson.

All through these last months in Rome we find Ibsen in the worst of humors. If it be admissible to compare him with an animal, he seems the badger among the writers of his time, nocturnal, inoffensive, solitary, but at the rumor of disturbance apt to rush out of its burrow and bite with terrific ferocity. The bite of Ibsen was no joke, and in moments of exasperation he bit, without selection, friend and foe alike. Among other snaps of the pen, he told Björnson that if he was not taken seriously as a poet, he should try his "fate as a photographer." Björnson, genially and wittily, took this up at once, and begged him to put his photography into the form of a comedy. But the devil, as Ibsen himself said, was throwing his shadow between the friends, and all the benefits and all the affection of the old dark days were rapidly forgotten. They quarrelled, too, rather absurdly, about decorations from kings and ministers; Björnson having determined to reject all such gewgaws, Ibsen announced his intention of ac-

cepting (and wearing) every cross and star that was offered to him. At this date, no doubt, the temptation was wholly problematical in both cases, yet each poet acted on his determination to the end. But Björnson's hint about the comedy seems to have been, for some years, the last flicker of friendship between the two. On this Ibsen presently acted in a manner very offensive to Björnson.

In March, 1868, Ibsen was beginning to be very much indeed incensed with things in general. "What Norway wants is a national disaster," he amiably snarled. It was high time that the badger should seek shelter in a new burrow, and in May we find him finally quitting Rome. There was a farewell banquet, at which Julius Lange, who was present, remarks that Ibsen showed a spice of the devil, but "was very witty and amiable." He went to Florence for June, then quitted Italy altogether, settling for three months at Berchtesgaden, the romantic little "sunbath" in the Salzburg Alps, then still very quiet and unfashionable. There he started his five-act comedy, *The League of Youth*. All September he spent in Munich, and in October, 1868, took root once more, this time at Dresden, which became his home for a considerable number of years. Almost at once he sank down again into

his brooding mood of isolation and quietism, roaming about the streets of Dresden, as he had haunted those of Rome, by night or at unfrequented hours, very solitary, seeing few visitors, writing few letters, slowly finishing his "photographic" comedy, which he did not get off his hands until March, 1869. Although he was still very poor, he refused all solicitations from editors to write for journals or magazines; he preferred to appear before the public at long intervals, with finished works of importance.

It is impossible for a critic who is not a Norwegian, or not closely instructed in the politics and manners of the North, to take much interest in *The League of Youth*, which is the most provincial of all Ibsen's mature works. There is a cant phrase minted in the course of it, *de lokale forhold*, which we may awkwardly translate as "the local conditions" or "situation." The play is all concerned with *de lokale forhold*, and there is an overwhelming air of Little Pedlington about the intrigue. This does not prevent *The League of Youth* from being, as Mr. Archer has said, "the first prose comedy of any importance in Norwegian literature,"[1] but it excludes it from

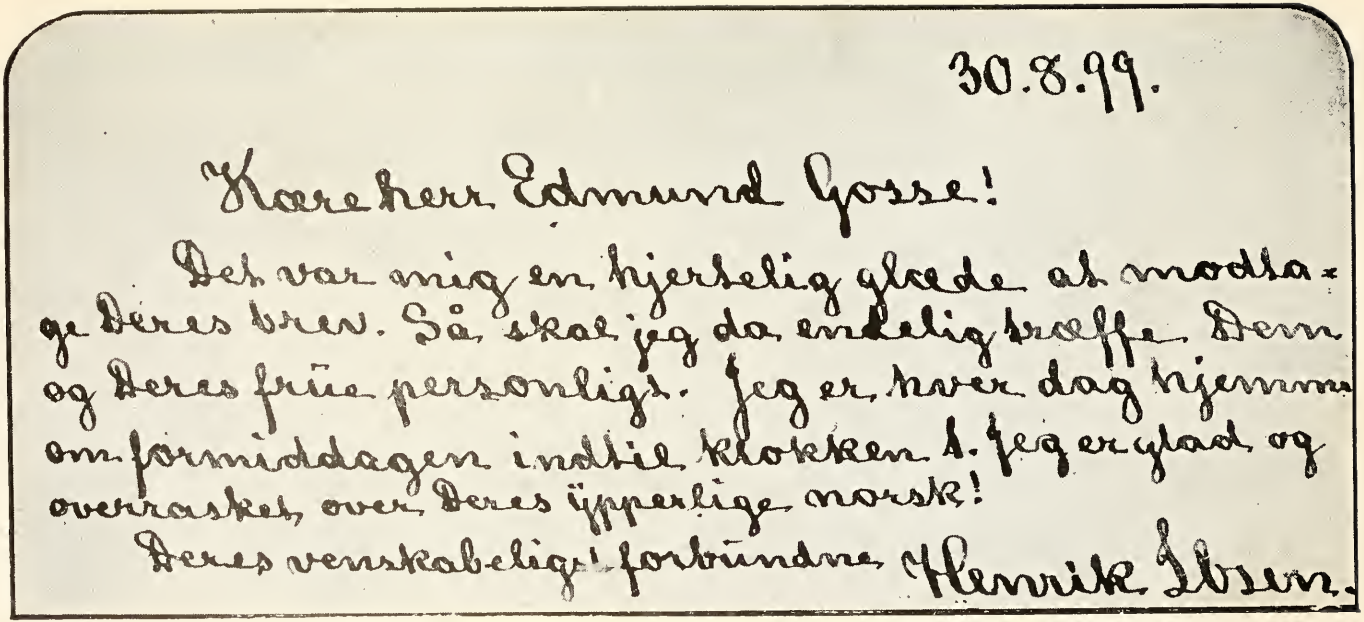
[1] It is to be supposed that Mr. Archer deliberately prefers *The League of Youth* to Björnson's *The Newly Married Couple* (1865), a slighter, but, as it seems to me, a more amusing comedy.

the larger European view. Oddly enough, Ibsen believed, or pretended to believe, that *The League of Youth* was a "placable" piece of foolery, which could give no annoyance to the worst of offenders by its innocent and indulgent banter. Perhaps, like many strenuous writers, he underestimated the violence of his own language; perhaps, living so long at a distance from Norway and catching but faintly the reverberations of its political turmoil, he did not realize how sensitive the native patriot must be to any chaff of "*de lokale forhold*." When he found that the Norwegians were seriously angry, Ibsen bluntly told them that he had closely studied the ways and the manners of their "pernicious and lie-steeped clique." He was always something of a snake in the grass to his poetic victims.

Mr. Archer, whose criticism of this play is extraordinarily brilliant, does his best to extenuate the stiffness of it. But to my own ear, as I read it again after a quarter of a century, there rise the tones of the stilted, the unsmiling, the essentially provincial and boringly solemn society of Christiania as it appeared to a certain young pilgrim in the early seventies, condensing, as it then seemed to do, all the sensitiveness, the arrogance, the crudity which made communication with the excellent and hospitable Norwegians of that past

epoch so difficult for an outsider—so difficult, in particular, for one coming freshly from the grace and sweetness, the delicate, cultivated warmth of Copenhagen. The political conditions which led to the writing of *The League of Youth* are old history now. There was the "liberal" element in Norwegian politics, which was in 1868 becoming rapidly stronger and more hampering to the Government, and there was the increasing influence of Sören Jaabæk (1814–94), a peasant farmer of ultra-socialistic views, who had, almost alone, opposed in the Storthing the grant of any pensions to poets, and whose name was an abomination to Ibsen.

Now Björnson, in the development of his career as a political publicist, had been flirting more and more outrageously with these extreme ideas and this truculent peasant party. He had even burned incense before Jaabæk, who was the accursed Thing. Ibsen, from the perspective of Dresden, genuinely believed that Björnson, with his ardor and his energy and his eloquence, was becoming a national danger. We have seen that Björnson had piqued Ibsen's vanity about *Peer Gynt*, and nothing exasperates a friendship more fatally than public principle grafted on a private slight. Moreover, the whole nature of Björnson was gregarious, that of Ibsen solitary; Björnson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Kære herr Edmund Gosse!

Det var mig en hjertelig glæde at modta-
ge Deres brev. Så skal jeg da endelig træffe Dem
og Deres frue personligt. Jeg er hver dag hjemme
om formiddagen indtil klokken 1. Jeg er glad og
overrasket over Deres ypperlige norsk!

Deres venskabelig forbundne Henrik Ibsen.

Facsimile of Ibsen's Handwriting.

must always be leading the majority, Ibsen had scruples of conscience if ten persons agreed with him. They were doomed to disagreement. Meanwhile, Ibsen burned his ships by creating the figure of Stensgaard, in *The League of Youth*, a frothy and mischievous demagogue whose rhetoric irresistibly reminded every one of Björnson's rolling oratory. What Björnson, not without dignity, objected to was not so much the personal attack, as that the whole play attempted "to paint our young party of liberty as a troop of pushing, phrase-mongering adventurers, whose patriotism lay solely in their words." Ibsen acknowledged that that was exactly his opinion of them, and what could follow for such a disjointed friendship but anger and silence?

The year 1869, which we now enter, is remarkable in the career of Ibsen as being that in which he travelled most, and appeared on the surface of society in the greatest number of capacities. He was enabled to do this by a considerable increase in his pension. First of all, he was induced to pay a visit of some months to Stockholm, being seized with a sudden strong desire to study conditions in Sweden, a country which he had hitherto professed to dislike. He had a delightful stay of two months, received from King Carl the order of the Wasa, was fêted at banquets, renewed his

acquaintance with Snoilsky, and was treated everywhere with the highest distinction. Ibsen and Björnson were now beginning to be recognized as the two great writers of Norway, and their droll balance as the Mr. and Mrs. Jack Sprat of letters was already becoming defined. It was doubtless Björnson's emphatic attacks on Sweden that at this moment made Ibsen so loving to the Swedes and so beloved. He was in such clover at Stockholm that he might have lingered on there indefinitely, if the Khedive had not invited him, in September, to be his guest at the opening of the Suez Canal. This sudden incursion of an Oriental potentate into the narrative seems startling until we recollect that illustrious persons were invited from all countries to this ceremony. The interesting thing is to see that Ibsen was now so famous as to be naturally so selected; the only other Norwegian guest being Professor J. D. C. Lieblein, the Egyptologist.

The poet started for Egypt, by Dresden and Paris, on September 28. *The League of Youth* was published on the 29th, and first performed on October 18; Ibsen, therefore, just missed the scandal and uproar caused by the play in Norway. In company with eighty-five other people, all illustrious guests of the Khedive, and under the care of Mariette Bey, Ibsen made a twenty-four

days' expedition up the Nile into Nubia, and then back to Cairo and Port Saïd. There, on November 17, in the company of an empress and several princes of the blood, he saw the Canal formally opened and graced a grand processional fleet that sailed out from Port Saïd towards Ismaila. But on the quay at Port Saïd Ibsen's Norwegian mail was handed to him, and letters and newspapers alike were full of the violent scenes in the course of which *The League of Youth* had been hissed down at Christiania. Then and there he sent his defiance back to Norway in *At Port Saïd*, one of the most pointed and effective of all his polemical lyrics. A version in literal prose must suffice, though it does cruel injustice to the venomous melody of the original:

The dawn of the Eastern Land
Over the haven glittered;
Flags from all corners of the globe
Quivered from the masts.
Voices in music
Bore onward the cantata;
A thousand cannon
Christened the Canal.

The steamers passed on
By the obelisk.
In the language of my home
Came to me the chatter of news.

The mirror-poem which I had polished
For masculine minxes
Had been smeared at home
By splutterings from penny whistles.

The poison-fly stung;
It made my memories loathsome.
Stars, be thanked!—
My home is what is ancient!
We hailed the frigate
From the roof of the river-boat;
I waved my hat
And saluted the flag.

To the feast, to the feast,
In spite of the fangs of venomous reptiles!
A selected guest
Across the Lakes of Bitterness!
At the close of day
Dreaming, I shall slumber
Where Pharaoh was drowned—
And when Moses passed over.

In this mood of defiance, with rage unabated, Ibsen returned home by Alexandria and Paris, and was in Dresden again in December.

The year of 1870 drove him out of Dresden, as the French occupation had driven him out of Rome. It was essential for him to be at rest in the midst of a quiet and alien population. He was drawn towards Denmark, partly for the sake

of talk with Brandes, who had now become a factor in his life, partly to arrange about the performance of one of his early works, and in particular of *The Pretenders*. No definite plan, however, had been formed, when, in the middle of June, war was declared between Germany and France; but a fortnight later Ibsen quitted Saxony, and settled for three months in Copenhagen, where his reception was charmingly sympathetic. By the beginning of October, after the fall of Strasburg and the hemming in of Metz, however, it was plain on which side the fortunes of the war would lie, and Ibsen returned "as from a rejuvenating bath" of Danish society to a Dresden full of French prisoners, a Dresden, too, suffering terribly from the paralysis of trade, and showing a plentiful lack of enthusiasm for Prussia.

Ibsen turned his back on all such vexatious themes, and set himself to the collecting and polishing of a series of lyrical poems, the *Digte* of 1871, the earliest, and, indeed, the only such collection that he published. We may recollect that, at the very same moment, with far less cause to isolate himself from the horrors of war, Théophile Gautier was giving the last touches to *Emaux et Camées*. In December, 1870, Ibsen addressed to Fru Limnell, a lady in Stockholm, his "Balloon-Letter," a Hudibrastic rhymed epistle

in nearly 400 lines, containing, with a good deal that is trivial, some striking symbolical reminiscences of his trip through Egypt, and some powerful ironic references to the caravan of German invaders, with its Hathor and its Horus, which was then rushing to the assault of Paris under the doleful colors of the Prussian flag. Ibsen's sarcasms are all at the ugliness and prosaic utilitarianism of the Germans; "Moltke," he says, "has killed the poetry of battles."

Ibsen was now greatly developing and expanding his views, and forming a world-policy of his own. The success of German discipline deeply impressed him, and he thought that the day had probably dawned which would be fatal to all revolt and "liberal rebellion" for the future. More than ever he dreaded the revolutionary doctrines of men like Jaabæk and Björnson, which would lead, he thought, to bloodshed and national disaster. The very same events were impressing Goldwin Smith at the very same moment with his famous prophecy that the abolition of all dynastic and aristocratic institutions was at hand, with "the tranquil inauguration" of elective industrial governments throughout the world. So history moves doggedly on, *propheten rechts*, *propheten links*, a perfectly impassive *welt-kind* in the middle of them. In Copenhagen Ibsen had,

after all, missed Brandes, delayed in Rome by a long and dangerous illness; and all he could do was to exchange letters with this still unseen but increasingly sympathetic and beloved young friend. To Brandes Ibsen wrote more freely than to any one else about the great events which were shaking the face of Europe and occupying so much of both their thoughts:—

The old, illusory France has collapsed [he wrote to Brandes on December 20, 1870, two days after the engagement at Nuits]; and as soon as the new, real Prussia does the same, we shall be with one bound in a new age. How ideas will then come tumbling about our ears! And it is high time they did. Up till now we have been living on nothing but the crumbs from the revolutionary table of last century, a food out of which all nutriment has long been chewed. The old terms require to have a new meaning infused into them. Liberty, equality and fraternity are no longer the things they were in the days of the late-lamented Guillotine. This is what the politicians will not understand, and therefore I hate them. They want their own special revolutions—revolutions in externals, in politics and so forth. But all this is mere trifling. What is all-important is the revolution of the Spirit of Man.

This revolution, as exemplified by the Commune in Paris, did not satisfy the anticipations which Ibsen had formed, and Brandes took advantage of this to tell him that he had not yet studied politics minutely enough from the scien-

tific standpoint. Ibsen replied that what he did not possess as knowledge came to him, to a certain degree, as intuition or instinct. "Let this be as it may, the poet's essential task is to see, not to reflect. For me in particular there would be danger in too much reflection." Ibsen seems, at this time, to be in an oscillating frame of mind, now bent on forming some positive theory of life out of which his imaginative works shall crystallize, harmoniously explanatory; at another time, anxious to be unhampered by theories and principles, and to represent individuals and exceptions exactly as experience presents them to him. In neither attitude, however, is there discernible any trace of the moral physician, and this is the central distinction between Tolstoi and Ibsen, whose methods, at first sight, sometimes appear so similar. Tolstoi analyzes a morbid condition, but always with the purpose, if he can, of curing it; Ibsen gives it even closer clinical attention, but he leaves to others the care of removing a disease which his business is solely to diagnose.

The *Poems*, after infinite revision, were published at length, in a very large edition, on May 3, 1871. One reason why Ibsen was glad to get this book off his hands was that it enabled him to concentrate his thoughts on the great drama he had been projecting, at intervals, for seven years past,

the trilogy (as he then planned it) on the story of Julian the Apostate. At last Brandes came to Dresden (July, 1871) and found the tenebrous poet plunged in the study of Neander and Strauss, Gibbon unfortunately being a sealed book to him. All through the autumn and winter he was kept in a chronic state of irritability by the intrigues and the menaces of a Norwegian pirate, who threatened to reprint, for his own profit, Ibsen's early and insufficiently protected writings. This exacerbated the poet's dislike to his own country, where the very law courts, he thought, were hostile to him. On this subject he used language of tiresome over-emphasis. "From Sweden, from Denmark, from Germany, I hear nothing but what gives me pleasure; it is from Norway that everything bad comes upon me." It was indicated to would-be Norwegian visitors that they were not welcome at Dresden. Norwegian friends, he said, were "a costly luxury" which he was obliged to deny himself.

The First Part of *Julian* was finished on Christmas Day, but it took over a year more before the entire work, as we now possess it, was completed. "A Herculean labor," the author called it, when he finally laid down a weary pen in February, 1873. The year 1872 had been very

quietly spent in unremitting literary labor, tempered by genial visits from some illustrious Danes of the older generation, as particularly Hans Christian Andersen and Meyer Aron Goldschmidt, and by more formal intercourse with a few Germans such as Konrad Maurer and Paul Heyse; all this time, let us remember, no Norwegians—"by request." The summer was spent in long rambles over the mountains of Austria, ending up with a month of deep repose in Berchtesgaden. The next year was like unto this, except that its roaming, restless summer closed with several months in Vienna; and on October 17, 1873, *nonum in annum*, after the Horatian counsel, the prodigious masterpiece, *Emperor and Galilean*, was published in Copenhagen at last.

Of all the writings of Ibsen, his huge double drama on the rise and fall of Julian is the most extensive and the most ambitious. It is not difficult to understand what it was about the most subtle and the most speculative of the figures which animate the decline of antiquity that fascinated the imagination of Ibsen. Successive historians have celebrated the flexibility of intelligence and firmness of purpose which were combined in the brain of Julian with a passion for abstract beauty and an enthusiasm for a restored

system of pagan Hellenic worship. There was an individuality about Julian, an absence of the common purple convention, of the imperial rhetoric, which strongly commended him to Ibsen, and in his perverse ascetic revolt against Christianity he offered a fascinating originality to one who thought the modern world all out of joint. As a revolutionary, Julian presented ideas of character which could not but passionately attract the Norwegian poet. His attitude to his emperor and to his God, sceptical, in each case, in each case inspired by no vulgar motive but by a species of lofty and melancholy fatalism, promised a theme of the most entrancing complexity. But there are curious traces in Ibsen's correspondence of the difficulty, very strange in his case, which he experienced in forming a concrete idea of Julian in his own mind. He had been vaguely drawn to the theme, and when it was too late to recede, he found himself baffled by the paradoxes which he encountered, and by the contradictions of a figure seen darkly through a mist of historical detraction.

He met these difficulties as well as he could, and as a prudent dramatic poet should, by close and observant study of the document. He endeavored to reconcile the evident superiority of Julian with the absurd eccentricities of his private man-

ners and with the futility of his public acts. He noted all the Apostate's foibles by the side of his virtues and his magnanimities. He traced without hesitation the course of that strange insurrection which hurled a coarse fanatic from the throne, only to place in his room a literary pedant with inked fingers and populous beard. He accepted everything, from the parasites to the purple slippers. The dangers of so humble an attendance upon history were escaped with success in the first instalment of his "world drama." In the strong and mounting scenes of *Cæsar's Apostacy*, the rapidity with which the incidents succeed one another, their inherent significance, the innocent splendor of Julian's mind in its first emancipation from the chains of false faith, combine to produce an effect of high dramatic beauty. Georg Brandes, whose instinct in such matters was almost infallible, when he read the First Part shortly after its composition, entreated Ibsen to give this, as it stood, to the public, and to let *The Emperor Julian's End* follow independently. Had Ibsen consented to do this, *Cæsar's Fall* would certainly take a higher place among his works than it does at present, when its effect is somewhat amputated and its meaning threatened with incoherence by the author's apparent *volte-face* in the Second Part.

It was a lifelong disappointment to Ibsen that *Emperor and Galilean*, on which he expended far more consideration and labor than on any other of his works, was never a favorite either with the public or among the critics. With the best will in the world, however, it is not easy to find full enjoyment in this gigantic work, which by some caprice of style defiant of analysis, lacks the vitality which is usually characteristic of Ibsen's least production. The speeches put into the mouths of antique characters are appropriate, but they are seldom vivid; as Bentley said of the epistles of Julian's own teacher Libanius, "You feel by the emptiness and deadness of them, that you converse with some dreaming pedant, his elbow on his desk." The scheme of Ibsen's drama was too vast for the very minute and meticulous method he chose to adopt. What he gives us is an immense canvas, on which he has painted here and there in miniature. It is a pity that he chose for dramatic representation so enormous a field. It would have suited his genius far better to have abandoned any attempt to write a conclusive history, and have selected some critical moment in the life of Julian. He should rather have concentrated his energies, independent of the chroniclers, on the resuscitation of that episode, and in the course of it have

trembled less humbly under the uplifted finger of Ammianus.

Of *Emperor and Galilean* Ibsen afterwards said: "It was the first" (but he might have added "the only") "poem which I have written under the influence of German ideas." He was aware of the danger of living too long away from his own order of thought and language. But it was always difficult for him, once planted in a place, to pull up his roots. A weariness took possession of him after the publication of his double drama, and he did practically nothing for four years. This marks a central joint in the structure of his career, what the architects call a "channel" in it, adding to the general retrospect of Ibsen's work an aspect of solidity and resource. During these years he revised some of his early writings, made a closer study of the arts of sculpture and painting, and essayed, without satisfaction, a very brief sojourn in Norway. In the spring of 1875 he definitely moved with his family from Dresden to Munich.

The brief visit to Christiania in 1874 proved very unfortunate. Ibsen was suspicious, the Norwegians of that generation were constitutionally stiff and reserved; long years among Southern races had accustomed him to a plenitude in gesture and emphasis. He suffered, all the brief

time he was in Norway, from an intolerable *malaise*. Ten years afterwards, in writing to Björnson, the discomfort of that experience was still unallayed. "I have not yet saved nearly enough," he said, "to support myself and my family in the case of my discontinuing my literary work. And I should be obliged to discontinue it if I lived in Christiania. . . . This simply means that I should not write at all. When, ten years ago, after an absence of ten years, I sailed up the fjord, I felt a weight settling down on my breast, a feeling of actual physical oppression. And this feeling lasted all the time I was at home; I was not myself under the stare of all those cold, uncomprehending Norwegian eyes at the windows and in the streets."

Ibsen had now been more than ten years an exile from Norway, and his sentiments with regard to his own people were still what they were when, in July, 1872, he had sent home his *Ode for the Millenary Festival*. That very striking poem, one of the most solid of Ibsen's lyrical performances, had opened in the key of unmitigated defiance to popular opinion at home. It was intended to show Norwegians that they must alter their attitude towards him, as he would never change his behavior towards them. "My countrymen," he said:—

My countrymen, who filled for me deep bowls
Of wholesome bitter medicine, such as gave
The poet, on the margin of his grave,
Fresh force to fight where broken twilight rolls,—
My countrymen, who sped me o'er the wave,
An exile, with my griefs for pilgrim-soles,
My fears for burdens, doubts for staff, to roam,—
From the wide world I send you greeting home.

I send you thanks for gifts that help and harden,
Thanks for each hour of purifying pain;
Each plant that springs in my poetic garden
Is rooted where your harshness poured its rain;
Each shoot in which it blooms and burgeons forth
It owes to that gray weather from the North;
The sun relaxes, but the fog secures!
My country, thanks! My life's best gifts were yours.

In spite of these sardonic acknowledgments, Ibsen's fame in Norway, though still disputed, was now secure. In Denmark and Sweden it was almost unchallenged, and he was a name, at least, in Germany. In England, since 1872, he had not been without a prophet. But in Italy, Russia, France—three countries upon the intelligence of which he was presently to make a wide and durable impression—he was still quite unknown.

Meanwhile, in glancing over the general literature of Europe, we see his figure, at the threshold of his fiftieth year, taking greater and greater prominence. He had become, in the sudden

extinction of the illustrious old men of Denmark, the first living writer of the North. He was to Norway what Valera was to Spain, Carducci to Italy, Swinburne or Rossetti to England, and Leconte de Lisle to France. These were mainly lyrical poets, but it must not be forgotten that Ibsen, down at least till 1871, was prominently illustrious as a writer in metrical form. If, in the second portion of his career, he resolutely deprived himself of all indulgence in the ornament of verse, it was a voluntary act of austerity. It was Charles V at Yuste, wilfully exchanging the crown of jewels for the coarse brown cowl of St. Jerome. And now, after a year or two of prayer and fasting, Ibsen began a new intellectual career.

CHAPTER VI

1875–82

While Ibsen was sitting at Munich, in this climacteric stage of his career, dreaming of wonderful things and doing nothing, there came to him, in the early months of 1875, two new plays by his chief rival. These were *The Editor* and *A Bankruptcy*, in which Björnson suddenly swooped from his sagas and his romances down into the middle of sordid modern life. This was his first attempt at that "photography by comedy" which he had urged on Ibsen in 1868. It is not, I think, recorded what was Ibsen's comment on these two plays, and particularly on *A Bankruptcy*, but it is written broadly over the surface of his own next work. It is obvious that he perceived that Björnson had carried a very spirited raid into his own particular province, and he was determined to drive this audacious enemy back by means of greater audacities.

Not at once, however; for an extraordinary languor seemed to have fallen upon Ibsen. His

isolation from society became extreme; for nearly a year he gave no sign of life. In September, 1875, indeed, if not earlier, he was at work on a five-act play, but what this was is unknown. It seems to have been in the winter of 1876, after an unprecedented period of inanimation, that he started a new comedy, *The Pillars of Society*, which was finished in Munich in July, 1877, that summer being unique in the fact that the Ibsens do not seem to have left town at all.

Ibsen was now a good deal altered in the exteriors of character. With his fiftieth year he presents himself as no more the Poet, but the Man of Business. Molbech told me that at this time the velveteen jacket, symbol of the dear delays of art, was discarded in favor of a frock-coat, too tight across the chest. Ibsen was now beginning, rather shyly, very craftily, to invest money; he even found himself in frequent straits for ready coin from his acute impatience to set every rix-dollar breeding. He cast the suspicion of poetry from him, and with his gold spectacles, his Dundreary whiskers, his broadcloth bosom and his quick staccato step, he adopted the pose of a gentleman of affairs, very positive and with no nonsense about him.

He had long determined on the wilful abandonment of poetic form, and the famous state-

ment made in a letter to myself (January 15, 1874) must be quoted, although it is well known, since it contains the clearest of all the explanations by which Ibsen justified his new departure:—

You are of opinion that the drama [*Emperor and Galilæan*] ought to have been written in verse, and that it would have gained by this. Here I must differ from you. The play is, as you will have observed, conceived in the most realistic style: the illusion I wished to produce is that of reality. I wished to produce the impression on the reader that what he was reading was something that had really happened. If I had employed verse, I should have counteracted my own intention and prevented the accomplishment of the task I had set myself. The many ordinary insignificant characters whom I have intentionally introduced into the play would have become indistinct, and indistinguishable from one another, if I had allowed all of them to speak in one and the same rhythmical measure. We are no longer living in the days of Shakespeare. Among sculptors there is already talk of painting statues in the natural colors. Much can be said both for and against this. I have no desire to see the Venus of Milo painted, but I would rather see the head of a negro executed in black than in white marble. Speaking generally, the style must conform to the degree of ideality which pervades the representation. My new drama is no tragedy in the ancient acceptation; what I desired to depict were human beings, and therefore I would not let them talk "the language of the Gods."

This revolt against dramatic verse was a feature of the epoch. In 1877 Alphonse Daudet was to

write of a comedy, "Mais, hélas! cette pièce est en vers, et l'ennui s'y promène librement entre les rimes."

No poet, however, sacrificed so much, or held so rigidly to his intention of reproducing the exact language of real life, as did Ibsen in the series of plays which opens with *The Pillars of Society*. This drama was published in Copenhagen in October, 1877, and was acted almost immediately in Denmark, Sweden and Norway; it had the good fortune to be taken up warmly in Germany. What Ibsen's idea was, in the new sort of realistic drama which he was inventing, was, in fact, perceived at once by German audiences, although it was not always approved of. He was the guest of the theatromaniac Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, and *The Pillars of Society* was played in many parts of Germany. In Scandinavia the book of the play sold well, and the piece had some success on the boards, but it did not create anything like so much excitement as the author had hoped that it would. Danish taste pronounced it "too German."

For the fact that *The Pillars of Society*, except in Scandinavia and Germany, did not then, and never has since, taken a permanent hold upon the theatre, Mr. William Archer gives a reason which cannot be controverted, namely, that by the time

the other foreign publics had fully awakened to the existence of Ibsen,

he himself had so far outgrown the phase of his development marked by *Pillars of Society*, that the play already seemed commonplace and old-fashioned. It exactly suited the German public of the eighties; it was exactly on a level with their theatrical intelligence. But it was above the theatrical intelligence of the Anglo-American public, and . . . below that of the French public. This is of course an exaggeration. What I mean is that there was no possible reason why the countrymen of Augier and Dumas should take any special interest in *Pillars of Society*. It was not obviously in advance of these masters in technical skill, and the vein of Teutonic sentiment running through it could not greatly appeal to the Parisian public of that period.

The subject of *The Pillars of Society* was the hollowness and rottenness of those supports, and the severe and unornamented prose which Ibsen now adopted was very favorable to its discussion. He was accused, however, of having lived so long away from home as to have fallen out of touch with real Norwegian life, which he studied in the convex mirror of the newspapers. It is more serious objection to *The Pillars of Society* that in it, as little as in *The League of Youth*, had Ibsen cut himself off from the traditions of the well-made play. Gloomy and homely as are the earlier acts, Ibsen sees as yet no way out of the

imbroglio but that known to Scribe and the masters of the "well-made" play. The social hypocrisy of Consul Bernick is condoned by a sort of death-bed repentance at the close, which is very much of the usual "bless-ye-my-children" order. The loss of the *Indian Girl* is miraculously prevented, and at the end the characters are solemnized and warned, yet are left essentially none the worse for their alarm. This, unfortunately, is not the mode in which the sins of scheming people find them out in real life. But to the historical critic it is very interesting to see Björnson and Ibsen nearer one another in *A Bankruptcy* and *The Pillars of Society* than they had ever been before. They now started on a course of eager, though benevolent, rivalry which was eminently to the advantage of each of them.

No feature of Ibsen's personal career is more interesting than his relation to Björnson. Great as the genius of Ibsen was, yet, rating it as ungrudgingly as possible, we have to admit that Björnson's character was the more magnetic and more radiant of the two. Ibsen was a citizen of the world; he belonged, in a very remarkable degree, to the small class of men whose intelligence lifts them above the narrowness of local conditions, who belong to civilization at large, not to the system of one particular nation. He

was, in consequence, endowed, almost automatically, with the instinct of regarding ideas from a central point; if he was to be limited at all, he might be styled European, although, perhaps, few Western citizens would have had less difficulty than he in making themselves comprehended by a Chinese, Japanese or Indian mind of unusual breadth and cultivation. On the other hand, in accepting the advantages of this large mental outlook, he was forced to abandon those of nationality. No one can say that Ibsen was, until near the end of his life, a good Norwegian, and he failed, by his utterances, to vibrate the local mind. But Björnson, with less originality, was the typical patriot in literature, and what he said, and thought, and wrote was calculated to stir the local conscience to the depths of its being.

When, therefore, in 1867, Ibsen, who was bound by all natural obligations and tendencies to remain on the best terms with Björnson, allowed the old friendship between them to lapse into positive antagonism, he was following the irresistible evolution of his fate, as Björnson was following his. It was as inevitable that Ibsen should grow to his full height in solitude as it was that Björnson should pine unless he was fed by the dew and sunlight of popular meetings, torchlight processions of students and passionate appeals to local sentiment.

Trivial causes, such as those which we have chronicled earlier, might seem to lead up to a division, but that division was really inherent in the growth of the two men.

Ibsen, however, was not wholly a gainer at first even in genius, by the separation. It cut him off from Norway too entirely, and it threw him into the arms of Germany. There were thirteen years in which Ibsen and Björnson were nothing to one another, and these were not years of unmingled mental happiness for either of them. But during this long period each of these very remarkable men "came into his kingdom," and when there was no longer any chance that either of them could warp the nature of the other, fate brought them once more together.

The reconciliation began, of course, with a gracious movement from Björnson. At the end of 1880, writing for American readers, Björnson had the generous candor to say: "I think I have a pretty thorough acquaintance with the dramatic literature of the world, and I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that Henrik Ibsen possesses more dramatic power than any other play-writer of our day." When we remember that, in France alone, Augier and Dumas *fils* and Hugo, Halévy and Meilhac and Labiche, were all of them alive, the compliment, though a sound, was a vivid one.

Sooner or later, everything that was said about Ibsen, though it were whispered in Choctaw behind the altar of a Burmese temple, came round to Ibsen's ears, and this handsome tribute from the rival produced its effect. And when, shortly afterwards, still in America, Björnson was nearly killed in a railway accident, Ibsen broke the long silence by writing to him a most cordial letter of congratulation.

The next incident was the publication of *Ghosts*, when Björnson, now thoroughly roused, stood out almost alone, throwing the vast prestige of his judgment into the empty scale against the otherwise unanimous black-balling. Then the reconcilement was full and fraternal, and Ibsen wrote from Rome (January 24, 1882), with an emotion rare indeed for him: "The only man in Norway who has frankly, boldly and generously taken my part is Björnson. It is just like him; he has, in truth, a great, a kingly soul; and I shall never forget what he has done now." Six months later, on occasion of Björnson's jubilee, Ibsen telegraphed: "My thanks for the work done side by side with me in the service of freedom these twenty-five years." These words wiped away all unhappy memories of the past; they gave public recognition to the fact that, though the two great poets had been divided for half a generation by the forces of

circumstance, they had both been fighting at wings of the same army against the common enemy.

This, however, takes us for the moment a little too far ahead. After the publication of *The Pillars of Society*, Ibsen remained quiet for some time; indeed, from this date we find him adopting the practice which was to be regular with him henceforth, namely, that of letting his mind lie fallow for one year after the issue of each of his works, and then spending another year in the formation of the new play. Munich gradually became tedious to him, and he justly observed that the pressure of German surroundings was unfavorable to the healthy evolution of his genius. In 1878 he went back to Rome, which, although it was no longer the quiet and aristocratic Rome of Papal days, was still immensely attractive to his temperament. He was now, in some measure, "a person of means," and he made the habit of connoisseurship his hobby. He formed a small collection of pictures, selecting works with, as he believed, great care. The result could be seen long afterwards by those who visited him in his final affluence, for they hung round the rooms of the sumptuous flat in which he spent his old age and in which he died. His taste, as far as one remembers, was for the Italian masters of the decline,

and whether he selected pictures with a good judgment must be left for others to decide. Probably he shared with Shelley a fondness for the Guercinos and the Guido Renis, whom we can now admire only in defiance of Ruskin.

In April, 1879, it is understood, a story was told him of an incident in the Danish courts, the adventure of a young married woman in one of the small towns of Zealand, which set his thoughts running on a new dramatic enterprise. He was still curiously irritated by contemplating, in his mind's eye, the "respectable, estimable narrow-mindedness and worldliness" of social conditions in Norway, where there was no aristocracy, and where a lower middle-class took the place of a nobility, with, as he thought, sordid results. But he was no longer suffering from what he himself had called "the feeling of an insane man staring at one single, hopelessly black spot." He went to Amalfi for the summer, and in that delightful spot, so curiously out of keeping with his present rigidly prosaic mood, he set himself to write what is probably the most widely famous of all his works, *A Doll's House*. The day before he started he wrote to me from Rome (in an unpublished letter of July 4, 1879): "I have been living here with my family since September last, and most of that time I have been occupied with the

situation, from slightly different points of view, in novel, poem and drama.[1]

The universal excitement which Ibsen had vainly hoped would be awakened by *The Pillars of Society* came, when he was not expecting it, to greet *A Doll's House*. Ibsen was stirred by the reception of his latest play into a mood rather different from that which he expressed at any other period. As has often been said, he did not pose as a prophet or as a reformer, but it did occur to him now that he might exercise a strong moral influence, and in writing to his German translator, Ludwig Passarge, he said (June 16, 1880):

> Everything that I have written has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through, even if it has not been my own personal experience; in every new poem or play I have aimed at my own spiritual emancipation and purification—for a man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs.

It was in this spirit of unusual gravity that he sat down to the composition of *Ghosts*. There is little or no record of how he occupied himself at Munich and Berchtesgaden in 1880, except that in March he began to sketch, and then aban-

[1] The reader who desires to obtain further light on the technical quality of *A Doll's House* can do no better than refer to Mr. William Archer's elaborate analysis of it (*Fortnightly Review*, July, 1906).

doned, what afterwards became *The Lady from the Sea*. In the autumn of that year, indulging once more his curious restlessness, he took all his household gods and goods again to Rome. His thoughts turned away from dramatic art for a moment, and he planned an autobiography, which was to deal with the gradual development of his mind, and to be called *From Skien to Rome*. Whether he actually wrote any of this seems uncertain; that he should have planned it shows a certain sense of maturity, a suspicion that, now in his fifty-third year, he might be nearly at the end of his resources. As a matter of fact, he was just entering upon a new inheritance. In the summer of 1881 he went, as usual now, to Sorrento, and there[1] the plot of *Ghosts* revealed itself to him. This work was composed with more than Ibsen's customary care, and was published at the beginning of December, in an edition of ten thousand copies.

Before the end of 1881 Ibsen was aware of the terrific turmoil which *Ghosts* had begun to occasion. He wrote to Passarge: "My new play

[1] *Note.*—So the authorities state: but in an unpublished letter to myself, dated Rome, November 26, 1880, I find Ibsen saying, "Just now I am beginning to exercise my thoughts over a new drama; I hope I shall finish it in the course of next summer." It seems to have been already his habit to meditate long about a subject before it took any definite literary form in his mind.

has now appeared, and has occasioned a terrible uproar in the Scandinavian press. Every day I receive letters and newspaper articles decrying or praising it. I consider it absolutely impossible that any German theatre will accept the play at present. I hardly believe that they will dare to play it in any Scandinavian country for some time to come." It was, in fact, not acted publicly anywhere until 1883, when the Swedes ventured to try it, and the Germans followed in 1887. The Danes resisted it much longer.

Ibsen declared that he was quite prepared for the hubbub; he would doubtless have been much disappointed if it had not taken place; nevertheless, he was disconcerted at the volume and the violence of the attacks. Yet he must have known that in the existing condition of society, and the limited range of what was then thought a defensible criticism of that condition, *Ghosts* must cause a virulent scandal. There has been, especially in Germany, a great deal of medico-philosophical exposure of the under-side of life since 1880. It is hardly possible that, there, or in any really civilized country, an analysis of the causes of what is, after all, one of the simplest and most conventional forms of hereditary disease could again excite such a startling revulsion of feeling. Krafft-Ebing and a crew of investigators,

Strindberg, Brieux, Hauptmann, and a score of probing playwrights all over the Continent, have gone further and often fared much worse than Ibsen did when he dived into the family history of Kammerherre Alving. When we read *Ghosts* to-day we cannot recapture the "new shudder" which it gave us a quarter of a century ago. Yet it must not be forgotten that the publication of it, in that hide-bound time, was an act of extraordinary courage. Georg Brandes, always clear-sighted, was alone in being able to perceive at once that *Ghosts* was no attack on society, but an effort to place the responsibilities of men and women on a wholesomer and surer footing, by direct reference to the relation of both to the child.

When the same eminent critic, however, went on to say that *Ghosts* was "a poetic treatment of the question of heredity," it was more difficult to follow him. Now that the flash and shock of the playwright's audacity are discounted, it is natural to ask ourselves whether, as a work of pure art, *Ghosts* stands high among Ibsen's writings. I confess, for my own part, that it seems to me deprived of "poetic" treatment, that is to say, of grace, charm and suppleness, to an almost fatal extent. It is extremely original, extremely vivid and stimulating, but, so far as a foreigner may judge, the dialogue seems stilted

and uniform, the characters, with certain obvious exceptions, rather types than persons. In the old fighting days it was necessary to praise *Ghosts* with extravagance, because the vituperation of the enemy was so stupid and offensive, but now that there are no serious adversaries left, cooler judgment admits—not one word that the idiot-adversary said, but—that there are more convincing plays than *Ghosts* in Ibsen's repertory.

Up to this time, Ibsen had been looked upon as the mainstay of the Conservative party in Norway, in opposition to Björnson, who led the Radicals. But the author of *Ghosts*, who was accused of disseminating anarchism and nihilism, was now smartly drummed out of the Tory camp without being welcomed among the Liberals. Each party was eager to disown him. He was like Coriolanus, when he was deserted by nobles and people alike, and

> suffer'd by the voice of slaves to be
> Whoop'd out of Rome.

The situation gave Ibsen occasion, from the perspective of his exile, to form some impressions of political life which were at once pungent and dignified:

"I am more and more confirmed" [he said, Jan, 3, 1882] "in my belief that there is something demoralizing in politics

and parties. I, at any rate, shall never be able to join a party which has the majority on its side. Björnson says, 'The majority is always right'; and as a practical politician he is bound, I suppose, to say so. I, on the contrary, of necessity say, 'The minority is always right.'"

In order to place this view clearly before his countrymen, he set about composing the extremely vivid and successful play, perhaps the most successful pamphlet-play that ever was written, which was to put forward in the clearest light the claim of the minority. He was very busy with preparations for it all through the summer of 1882, which he spent at what was now to be for many years his favorite summer resort, Gossensass in the Tyrol, a place which is consecrated to the memory of Ibsen in the way that Pornic belongs to Robert Browning and the Bel Alp to Tyndall, holiday homes in foreign countries, dedicated to blissful work without disturbance. Here, at a spot now officially named the "Ibsenplatz," he composed *The Enemy of the People*, engrossed in his invention as was his wont, reading nothing and thinking of nothing but of the persons whose history he was weaving. Oddly enough, he thought that this, too, was to be a "placable" play, written to amuse and stimulate, but calculated to wound nobody's feelings. The fact was that Ibsen, like some ocelot or panther of the rocks, had

a paw much heavier than he himself realized, and his "play," in both senses, was a very serious affair, when he descended to sport with common humanity.

Another quotation, this time from a letter to Brandes, must be given to show what Ibsen's attitude was at this moment to his fatherland and to his art:

"When I think how slow and heavy and dull the general intelligence is at home, when I notice the low standard by which everything is judged, a deep despondency comes over me, and it often seems to me that I might just as well end my literary activity at once. They really do not need poetry at home; they get along so well with the party newspapers and the *Lutheran Weekly*."

If Ibsen thought that he was offering them "poetry" in *The Enemy of the People*, he spoke in a Scandinavian sense. Our criticism has never opened its arms wide enough to embrace all imaginative literature as poetry, and in the English sense nothing in the world's drama is denser or more unqualified prose than *The Enemy of the People*, without a tinge of romance or rhetoric, as "unideal" as a blue-book. It is, nevertheless, one of the most certainly successful of its author's writings; as a stage-play it rivets the attention; as a pamphlet it awakens irresistible sympathy; as a specimen of dramatic art, its construction and

evolution are almost faultless. Under a transparent allegory, it describes the treatment which Ibsen himself had received at the hands of the Norwegian public for venturing to tell them that their spa should be drained before visitors were invited to flock to it. Nevertheless, the playwright has not made the mistake of identifying his own figure with that of Dr. Stockmann, who is an entirely independent creation. Mr. Archer has compared the hero with Colonel Newcome, whose loquacious amicability he does share, but Stockmann's character has much more energy and initiative than Colonel Newcome's, whom we could never fancy rousing himself "to purge society."

Ibsen's practical wisdom in taking the bull by the horns in his reply to the national reception of *Ghosts* was proved by the instant success of *The Enemy of the People*. Presented to the public in this new and audacious form, the problem of a "moral water-supply" struck sensible Norwegians as less absurd and less dangerous than they had conceived it to be. The reproof was mordant, and the worst offenders crouched under the lash. *Ghosts* itself was still, for some time, tabooed, but *The Enemy of the People* received a cordial welcome, and has remained ever since one of the most popular of Ibsen's writings. It is still extremely effective on the stage, and as it is lightened

by more humor than the author is commonly willing to employ, it attracts even those who are hostile to the intrusion of anything solemn behind the footlights.

CHAPTER VII

1883–91

With the appearance of *An Enemy of the People*, which was published in November, 1882, Ibsen entered upon a new stage in his career. He had completely broken with the Conservative party in Norway, without having gratified or won the confidence of the Liberals. He was now in personal relations of friendliness with Björnson, whose generous approval of his work as a dramatist sustained his spirits, but his own individualism had been intensified by the hostile reception of *Ghosts*. His life was now divided between Rome in the winter and Gossensass in the summer, and in the Italian city, as in the Tyrolese village, he wandered solitary, taciturn, absorbed in his own thoughts. His meditations led him more and more into a lonely state. He floated, as on a prophet's carpet, between the political heavens and earth, capriciously refusing to ascend or to alight. He had come to a sceptical stage in his mental evolution, a stage in which he was to remain for a

considerable time, gradually modifying it in a Conservative direction. One wonders what the simple-minded and stalwart Björnson thought of being quietly told (March 28, 1884) that the lower classes are nowhere liberal-minded or self-sacrificing, and that "in the views expressed by our [Norwegian] peasants there is not an atom more of real Liberalism than is to be found among the ultramontane peasantry of the Tyrol." In politics Ibsen had now become a pagan; "I do not believe," he said, "in the emancipatory power of political measures, nor have I much confidence in the altruism and good will of those in power."

This sense of the uselessness of effort is strongly marked in the course of the next work on which he was engaged, the very brilliant, but saturnine and sardonic tragi-comedy of *The Wild Duck*. The first sketch of it was made during the spring of 1884 in Rome, but the dramatist took it to Gossensass with him for the finishing touches, and did not perfect it until the autumn. It is remarkable that Ibsen invariably speaks of *The Wild Duck*, when he mentions it in his correspondence, in terms of irony. He calls it a collection of crazy tricks or tomfooleries, *galskaber*, an expression which carries with it, in this sense, a confession of wilful paradox. In something of the same spirit, Robert Browning, in the old days before he was

comprehended, used to speak of "the entirely unintelligible *Sordello*," as if, sarcastically, to meet criticism half-way.

When *The Wild Duck* was first circulated among Ibsen's admirers, it was received with some bewilderment. Quite slowly the idea received acceptance that the hitherto so serious and even angry satirist was, to put it plainly, laughing at himself. The faithful were reluctant to concede it. But one sees now, clearly enough, that in a sense it was so. I have tried to show, we imagine Ibsen saying, that your hypocritical sentimentality needs correction—you live in "A Doll's House." I have dared to point out to you that your society is physically and morally rotten and full of "Ghosts." You have repudiated my honest efforts as a reformer, and called me "An Enemy of the People." Very well, then, have it so if you please. What a fool am I to trouble about you at all. Go down a steep place in Gadara and drown yourselves. If it amuses you, it can amuse me also to be looked upon as Gregers Werle. *Vogue la galère.* "But as the play is neither to deal with the Supreme Court, nor the right of absolute veto, nor even with the removal of the sign of the union from the flag," burning questions then and afterwards in Norwegian politics, "it can hardly count upon arousing much

interest in Norway"; it will, however, amuse me immensely to point out the absurdity of my caring.

It is in reading *The Wild Duck* that for the first time the really astonishing resemblance which Ibsen bears to Euripedes becomes apparent to us. This is partly because the Norwegian dramatist now relinquishes any other central object than the presentation to his audience of the clash of temperament, and partly because here at last, and for the future always, he separates himself from everything that is not catastrophe. More than any earlier play, more even than *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck* is an avalanche which has begun to move, and with a movement unaffected by the incidents of the plot, long before the curtain rises. The later plays of Ibsen, unlike almost all other modern dramas, depend upon nothing that happens while they are being exhibited, but rush downwards to their inevitable close in obedience to a series of long-precedent impulses. In order to gain this effect, the dramatist has to be acquainted with everything that has ever happened to his personages, and we are informed that Ibsen used to build up in his own mind, for months at a time, the past history of his puppets. He was now master of this practice. We are not surprised, therefore, to find one of the most penetrating of dramatic critics remarking of *The Wild Duck* that

"never before had the poet displayed such an amazing power of fascinating and absorbing us by the gradual withdrawal of veil after veil from the past."

The result of a searching determination to deal with personal and not typical forms of temperament is seen in the firmness of the portraiture in *The Wild Duck*, where, I think, less than ever before, is to be found a trace of that incoherency which is to be met with occasionally in all the earlier works of Ibsen, and which seems like the effect of a sudden caprice or change of the point of view. There is, so far as I can judge, no trace of this in *The Wild Duck*, where the continuity of aspect is extraordinary. Confucius assures us that if we tell him our past, he will tell us our future, and although several of the characters in *The Wild Duck* are the most sordid of Ibsen's creations, the author has made himself so deeply familiar with them that they are absolutely life-like. The detestable Hialmar, in whom, by the looking-glass of a disordered liver, any man may see a picture of himself; the pitiable Gregers Werle, perpetually thirteenth at table, with his genius for making an utter mess of other people's lives; the vulgar Gina; the beautiful girlish figure of the little martyred Hedvig—all are wholly real and living persons.

The subject of the play, of course, is one which we do not expect, or had not hitherto expected, from Ibsen. It is the danger of "a sick conscience" and the value of illusion. Society may be full of poisonous vapors and be built on a framework of lies; it is nevertheless prudent to consider whether the ideal advantages of disturbing it overweigh the practical disadvantages, and above all to bear in mind that if you rob the average man of his illusions, you are almost sure to rob him of his happiness. The topsy-turvy nature of this theme made Ibsen as nearly "rollicking" as he ever became in his life. We can imagine that as he wrote the third act of *The Wild Duck*, where so horrible a luncheon party—"we'll all keep a corner"—gloats over the herring salad, he indulged again and again in those puffs of soundless and formidable mirth which Mr. Johan Paulsen describes as so surprising an element of conversation with Ibsen.

To the gossip of that amiable Boswell, too, we must turn for a valuable impression of the solidification of Ibsen's habits which began about this time, and which marked them even before he left Munich. He had now successfully separated himself from all society, and even his family saw him only at meals. Visitors could not penetrate to him, but, if sufficiently courageous, must hang about

on the staircase, hoping to catch him for a moment as he hurried out to the café. Within his study, into which the daring Paulsen occasionally ventured, Ibsen, we are to believe, did nothing at all, but "sat bent over the pacific ocean of his own mind, which mirrored for him a world far more fascinating, vast and rich than that which lay spread around him."[1]

And now the celebrated afternoons at the cafés had begun. In Rome Ibsen had his favorite table, and he would sit obliquely facing a mirror in which, half hidden by a newspaper and by the glitter of his gold spectacles, he could command a sight of the whole restaurant, and especially of the door into the street. Every one who entered, every couple that conversed, every movement of the scene, gave something to those untiring eyes. The newspaper and the café mirror—these were the books which, for the future, Ibsen was almost exclusively to study; and out of the gestures of a pair of friends at a table, out of a paragraph in a newspaper, even out of the terms of an advertisement, he could build up a drama. Incessant observation of real life, incessant capture of unaffected, unconsidered phrases, actual living experience leaping in his hands like a captive wild animal, this was now the substance from

[1] *Samliv med Ibsen*, 1906, p. 30.

which all Ibsen's dreams and dramas were woven. Concentration of attention on the vital play of character, this was his one interest.

Out of this he was roused by a sudden determination to go at last and see for himself what life in Norway was really like. A New England wit once denied that a certain brilliant and Europe-loving American author was a cosmopolitan. "No," he said, "a cosmopolitan is at home even in his own country." Ibsen began to doubt whether he was not too far off to follow events in Norway—and these were now beginning to be very exciting—well enough to form an independent judgment about them; and after twenty years of exile there is no doubt that the question was fairly put. *The Wild Duck* had been published in November, 1884, and had been acted everywhere in Scandinavia with great success. The critics and the public were agreed for the first time that Ibsen was a very great national genius, and that if Norway was not proud of him it would make a fool of itself in the eyes of Europe. Ibsen had said that Norway was a barbarous country, inhabited by two millions of cats and dogs, but so many agreeable and highly-civilized compliments found their way to him in Rome that he began to fancy that the human element was beginning to be introduced. At all events,

he would see for himself, and in June, 1885, instead of stopping at Gossensass, he pushed bravely on and landed in Christiania.

At first all went well, but from the very beginning of the visit he observed, or thought he observed, awkward phenomena. The country was thrilled with political excitement, and it vibrated with rhetorical resolutions which seemed to Ibsen very empty. He had a constitutional horror of purely theoretical questions, and these were occupying Norway from one end to the other. The King's veto, the consular difficulty, the Swedish emblem in the national flag, these were the subjects of frenzied discussion, and in none of these did Ibsen take any sort of pleasure. He was not politically far-sighted, it must be confessed, nor did he guess what practical proportions these "theoretical questions" were to assume in the immediate future.

That great writer and delightful associate, the Swedish poet, Count Snoilsky, one of the few whose company never wearied or irritated Ibsen, joined him in the far north. They spent a pleasant, quiet time together at Molde, that enchanting little sub-arctic town, where it looks southward over the shining fjord, with the Romsdalhorn forever guarding the mountainous horizon. Here no politics intruded, and Ibsen, when Snoil-

sky had left him, already thinking of a new drama, lingered on at Molde, spending hours on hours at the end of the jetty, gazing into the clear, cold sea. His passion for the sea had never betrayed him, and at Rome, where he had long given up going to any galleries or studios, he still haunted the house of a Norwegian marine painter, Nils Hansteen, whose sketches reminded him of old days and recollected waters.

But the autumn comes on apace in these high latitudes, and Ibsen had to return to Christiania with its torchlight processions, and late noisy feasts, and triumphant revolutionary oratory. He disliked it extremely, and he made up his mind to go back to the indifferent South, where people did not worry about such things. Unfortunately, the inhabitants of Christiania did not leave him alone. They were not content to have him among them as a retired observer, they wanted to make him stand out definitely on one political side or the other. He was urged, at the end of September, to receive the inevitable torchlight procession planned in his honor by the Union of Norwegian Students. He was astute enough to see that this might compromise his independence, but he was probably too self-conscious in believing that a trap was being laid for him. He said that, not having observed that his

presence gave the Union any great pleasure, he did not care to have its expression of great joy at his departure. This was not polite, for it does not appear that the students had any idea that he intended to depart. He would not address a reply to the Union as a body, but to "my friends among the students."

A committee called upon him to beg him to reconsider his resolution, but he roundly told them that he knew that they were reactionaries, and wanted to annex him to their party, and that he was not blind to their tricks. They withdrew in confusion, and Ibsen, in an agony of nervousness, determined to put the sea between himself and their machinations. Early in October he retreated, or rather fled, to Copenhagen, and thence to Munich, where he breathed again. Meanwhile, the extreme liberal faction among the students claimed that his action had meant that he was heart and soul with them, as against the reactionaries. A young Mr. Ove Rode, who had interviewed him, took upon himself to say that these were Ibsen's real sentiments. Ibsen fairly stamped with rage, and declared, in furious communications, that all these things were done on purpose. "It was an opportunity to insult a poet which it would have been a sad pity to lose," he remarked, with quivering pen. A re-

verberant controversy sprang up in the Norwegian newspapers, and Ibsen, in his Bavarian harbor of refuge, continued to vibrate all through the winter of 1885. The exile's return to his native country had proved to be far from a success.

Already his new play was taking shape, and the success of his great personal ambition, namely that his son, Sigurd, should be taken with honor into the diplomatic service of his country, did much to calm his spirits. Ibsen was growing rich now, as well as famous, and if only the Norwegians would let him alone, he might well be happy. The new play was *Rosmersholm*, and it took its impulse from a speech which Ibsen had made during his journey, at Trondhjem, where he expounded the gospel of individualism to a respectful audience of workingmen, and had laid down the necessity of introducing an aristocratic strain, *et adeligt element*, into the life of a truly democratic state, a strain which woman and labor were to unite in developing. He said: "I am thinking, of course, not of birth, nor of money, nor even of intellect, but of the nobility which grows out of character. It is *character* alone which can make us free." This nobility of character must be fostered, mainly, by the united efforts of motherhood and labor. This was quite a new creed in Norway, and it bewildered his

hearers, but it is remarkable to notice how the best public feeling in Scandinavia has responded to the appeal, and how little surprise the present generation would express at a repetition of such sentiments. And out of this idea of "nobility" of public character *Rosmersholm* directly sprang.

We are not left to conjecture in this respect. In a letter to Björn Kristensen (February 13, 1887), Ibsen deliberately explained, while correcting a misconception of the purpose of *Rosmersholm*, that "the play deals with the struggle which all serious-minded human beings have to wage with themselves in order to bring their lives into harmony with their convictions. . . . Conscience is very conservative. It has its deep roots in tradition and the past generally, and hence the conflict." When we come to read *Rosmersholm* it is not difficult to see how this order of ideas dominated Ibsen's mind when he wrote it. The mansion called by that name is typical of the ancient traditions of Norwegian bourgeois aristocracy, which are not to be subservient to such modern and timid conservatism as is represented by Rector Kroll, with his horror of all things new because they are new. The Rosmer strain, in its inherent nobility, is to be superior to a craven horror of the democracy, and is to show, by the courage with which it fulfils its personal destiny,

that it looks above and beyond all these momentary prejudices, and accepts, from all hands, whatever is wise and of good report.

The misfortune is that Ibsen, in unconscious bondage to his ideas, did not construct his drama sturdily enough on realistic lines. While not one of his works is more suggestive than *Rosmersholm*, there is not one which gives the unbeliever more opportunity to blaspheme. This ancestral house of a great rich race, which is kept up by the ministrations of a single aged female servant, stands in pure Cloud-Cuckoo Land. The absence of practical amenities in the Rosmer family might be set down to eccentricity, if all the other personages were not equally ill-provided. Rebecca, glorious heroine according to some admirers, "criminal, thief and murderess," as another admirer pleonastically describes her, is a sort of troll; nobody can explain—and yet an explanation seems requisite—what she does in the house of Rosmer. In his eagerness to work out a certain sequence of philosophical ideas, the playwright for once neglected to be plausible. It is a very remarkable feature of *Rosmersholm* that in it, for the first time, and almost for the last, Ibsen, in the act of theorizing, loses his hold upon reality. He places his ingenious, elaborate and—given the premises—inevitable dénouement in a scene scarcely more

credible than that of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, and not one-tenth as amusing. Following, as it does, immediately on the heels of *The Wild Duck*, which was as remarkable a slice of real life as was ever brought before a theatrical audience, the artificiality of *Rosmersholm* shows Ibsen as an artist clearly stepping backward that he may leap the further forward.

In other words, *Rosmersholm* is the proof of Ibsen's desire to conquer another field of drama. He had now for some years rejected with great severity all temptations from the poetic spirit, which was nevertheless ineradicable in him. He had wished to produce on the mind of the spectator no other impression than that he was observing something which had actually happened, exactly in the way and the words in which it would happen. He had formulated to the actress, Lucie Wolf, the principle that ideal dramatic poetry should be considered extinct, "like some preposterous animal form of prehistoric times." But the soul of man cannot be fed with a stone, and Ibsen had now discovered that perfectly prosaic "slices of life" may be salutary and valuable on occasion, but that sooner or later a poet asks for more. He, therefore, a poet if ever there was one, had grown weary of the self-made law by which he had shut himself out from Paradise

He determined, grudgingly, and hardly knowing how to set about it, that he would once more give the spiritual and the imaginative qualities their place in his work. These had now been excluded for nearly twenty years, since the publication of *Peer Gynt*, and he would not resume them so far as to write his dramas again in verse. Verse in drama was doomed; or if not, it was at least a juvenile and fugitive skill not to be rashly picked up again by a business-like bard of sixty. But he would reopen the door to allegory and symbol, and especially to fantastic beauty of landscape.

The landscape of *Rosmersholm* has all, or at least much, of the old enchantment. The scene at the mill-dam links us once more with the woods and the waters which we had lost sight of since *Peer Gynt*. But this element was still more evident in *The Lady from the Sea*, which was published in 1888. We have seen that Ibsen spent long hours, in the summer of 1885, at the end of the pier at Molde, gazing down into the waters, or watching the steamers arriving and departing, coming from the great sea beyond the fjord or going towards it. As was his wont, he stored up these impressions, making no immediate use of them. He actually prepared *The Lady from the Sea* in very different, although still marine sur-

roundings. He went to Jutland, and settled for the summer at the pretty and ancient, but very mild little town of Sæby, with the sands in front of him and rolling woods behind. From Sæby it was a short journey to Frederikshavn, "which he liked very much—he could knock about all day among the shipping, talking to the sailors, and so forth. Besides, he found the neighborhood of the sea favorable to contemplation and constructive thought." So Mr. Archer, who visited him at Sæby; and I myself, a year or two later, picked up at Frederikshavn an oral tradition of Ibsen, with his hands behind his back, and the frock-coat tightly buttoned, stalking, stalking alone for hours on the interminable promenade between the great harbor moles of Frederikshavn, no one daring to break in upon his formidable contemplation.

In several respects, though perhaps not in concentration of effect, *The Lady from the Sea* shows a distinct advance on *Rosmersholm*. It is never dull, never didactic, as its predecessor too often was, and there is thrown over the whole texture of it a glamour of romance, of mystery, of beauty, which had not appeared in Ibsen's work since the completion of *Peer Gynt*. Again, after the appearance of so many strenuous tragedies, it was pleasant to welcome a pure comedy. *The Lady*

from the Sea[1] is connected with the previous plays by its emphatic defence of individuality and its statement of the imperative necessity of developing it; but the tone is sunny, and without a tinge of pessimism. It is in some respects the reverse of *Rosmersholm;* the bitterness of restrained and balked individuality, which ends in death, being contrasted with the sweetness of emancipated and gratified individuality, which leads to health and peace. To the remarkable estimate of *The Lady from the Sea* formed by some critics, and in particular by M. Jules de Gaultier, we shall return in a general consideration of the symbolic plays, of which it is the earliest. Enough to say here that even those who did not plunge so deeply into its mysteries found it a remarkably agreeable spectacle, and that it has continued to be, in Scandinavia and Germany, one of the most popular of its author's works.

Ibsen left his little tavern at Sæby towards the end of September, 1887, in consequence of an invitation to proceed directly to Stockholm, where his Swedish admirers, now very numerous and enthusiastic, would no longer be deprived of the pleasure of entertaining him publicly. He appeared before them, the breast of his coat

[1] In the *Neue Rundschau* for December, 1906, there was published a first draft of *The Lady from the Sea,* dating as far back as 1880.

sparkling with foreign stars and crosses, the Urim and Thummim of general European recognition. He was now in his sixtieth year, and he had outlived all the obscurity of his youth. In the three Scandinavian countries—even in recalcitrant Norway—he was universally hailed as the greatest dramatist of the age. In Germany his fame was greater than that of any native writer of the same class. In Italy and Russia he was entering on a career of high and settled popularity. Even in France and England his work was now discussed with that passionate interest which shows the vitality of what is even, for the moment, misinterpreted and disliked. His admirers at Stockholm told him that he had taken a foremost place in re-creating their sense of life, that he was a fashioner and a builder of new social forms, that he was, indeed, to thousands of them, the Master-Builder. The reply he made to their enthusiasm was dignified and reserved, but it revealed a sense of high gratification. Skule's long doubt was over; he believed at last in his own kingdom, and that the world would be ultimately the better for the stamp of his masterful soul upon its surface.

It was in an unusually happy mood that he sat dreaming through the early part of the uneventful year 1889. But it gradually sank into melancholy when, in the following year, he settled down

to the composition of a new play which was to treat of sad thoughts and tragic passions. He told Snoilsky that for several reasons this work made very slow progress, "and it robbed him of his summer holidays." From May to November, 1890, he was uninterruptedly in Munich writing what is known to us now as *Hedda Gabler*. He finished it at last, saying as he did so, "It has not been my desire to deal in this play with so-called problems. What I principally wanted to do was to depict human beings, human emotions and human destinies, upon a groundwork of certain of the social conditions and principles of the present day." It was a proof of the immense growth of Ibsen's celebrity that editions of *Hedda Gabler* were called for almost simultaneously, in the winter of 1890, in London, New York, St. Petersburg, Leipzig, Berlin and Moscow, as well as in Copenhagen, Stockholm and Christiania. There was no other living author in the world at that moment who excited so much curiosity among the intellectual classes, and none who exercised so much influence on the younger generation of authors and thinkers.

In *Hedda Gabler* Ibsen returned, for the last time, but with concentrated vigor, to the prosaic ideal of his central period. He never succeeded in being more objective in drama, he

never kept more closely to the bare facts of nature nor rejected more vigorously the ornaments of romance and rhetoric than in this amazing play. There is no poetic suggestion here, no species of symbol, white horse, or gnawing thing, or monster from the sea. I am wholly in agreement with Mr. Archer when he says that he finds it impossible to extract any sort of general idea from *Hedda Gabler*, or to accept it as a satire of any condition of society. Hedda is an individual, not a type, and it was as an individual that she interested Ibsen. We have been told, since the poet's death, that he was greatly struck by the case, which came under his notice at Munich, of a German lady who poisoned herself because she was bored with life, and had strayed into a false position. *Hedda Gabler* is the realization of such an individual case. At first sight, it seemed as though Ibsen had been influenced by Dumas *fils*, which might have been true, in spite of the marked dislike which each expressed for the other;[1] but closer examination showed that *Hedda Gabler* had no sort of relation with the pamphlets of the master of Parisian problem-tragedy.

The attempt to show that *Hedda Gabler*

[1] It is said that *La Route de Thebes*, which Dumas had begun when he died, was to have been a deliberate attack on the methods and influence of Ibsen. Ibsen, on his part, loathed Dumas.

"proved" anything was annoying to Ibsen, who said, with more than his customary firmness, "It was not my purpose to deal with what people call problems in this play. What I chiefly tried to do was to paint human beings, human emotions and human fate, against a background of some of the conditions and laws of society as it exists to-day." The German critics, a little puzzled to find a longitude and latitude for Tesman's "tastefully decorated" villa, declared that this time Ibsen had written an "international," not a locally Norwegian, play. Nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, *Hedda Gabler* is perhaps the most fatally local and Norwegian of all Ibsen's plays, and it presents, not of course the highly-civilized Christiania of to-day, but the half-suburban, half-rural little straggling town of forty years ago. When I visited Norway as a lad, I received kind but sometimes rather stiff and raw hospitality in several tastefully decorated villas, which were as like that of the Tesmans as pea is like pea. Why Ibsen chose to paint a "west end of Christiania" of 1860 rather than of 1890 I cannot guess, unless it was that to so persistent an exile the former was far more familiar than the latter.

A Russian actress of extreme talent, Madame Alla Nazimova, who has had special opportuni-

ties of studying the part of Hedda Gabler, has lately (1907) depicted her as "aristocratic and ill-mated, ambitious and doomed to a repulsive alliance with a man beneath her station, whom she had mistakenly hoped would give her position and wealth. In other circumstances, Hedda would have been a power for beauty and good." If this ingenious theory be correct, *Hedda Gabler* must be considered as the leading example of Ibsen's often-repeated demonstration, that evil is produced by circumstances and not by character. The portrait becomes thrillingly vital if we realize that the stains upon it are the impact of accidental conditions on a nature which might otherwise have been useful and fleckless. Hedda Gabler is painted as Mr. Sargent might paint a lady of the London fashionable world; his brush would divine and emphasize, as Ibsen's pen does, the disorder of her nerves, and the ravaging concentration of her will in a sort of barren and impotent egotism, while doing justice to the superficial attractiveness of her cultivated physical beauty. He would show, as Ibsen shows, and with an equal lack of malice prepense, various detestable features which the mask of good manners had concealed. Each artist would be called a caricaturist because his instinctive penetration had taken him into regions where the powder-puff and the rouge-pot lose their power.

CHAPTER VIII

LAST YEARS

With the publication of *Hedda Gabler* Ibsen passed into what we may call his final glory. Almost insensibly, and to an accompaniment of his own growls of indignation, he had taken his place, not merely as the most eminent imaginative writer of the three Scandinavian countries, but as the type there of what literature should be and the prophet of what it would become. In 1880, Norway, the youngest and long the rawest of the three civilizations, was now the foremost in activity, and though the influence of Björnson and Jonas Lie was significant, yet it was not to be compared for breadth and complexity with that of Ibsen. The nature of the revolution, exercised by the subject of this memoir between 1880 and 1890, that is to say from *Ghosts* to *Hedda Gabler*, was destructive before it was constructive. The poetry, fiction and drama of the three Northern nations had become stagnant with commonplace and conventional matter, lumbered with the recognized, inevitable and sacrosanct forms of

composition. This was particularly the case in Sweden, where the influence of Ibsen now proved more violent and catastrophic than anywhere else. Ibsen destroyed the attraction of the old banal poetry; his spirit breathed upon it in fire, and in all its faded elegance it withered up and vanished.

The next event was that the new generation in the three Northern countries, deprived of its traditional authorities, looked about for a prophet and a father, and they found what they wanted in the exceedingly uncompromising elderly gentleman who remained so silent in the cafés of Rome and of Munich. The zeal of the young for this unseen and unsympathetic personage was extraordinary, and took forms of amazing extravagance. Ibsen's impassivity merely heightened the enthusiasm of his countless admirers, who were found, it should be stated, almost entirely among persons who were born after his exile from Norway. His writings supplied a challenge to character and intelligence which appealed to those who disliked the earlier system of morals and æsthetics against which he had so long fought single-handed.

Among writers in the North Ibsen began to hold very much the position that Whistler was taking among painters and etchers in this country, that is to say the abuse and ridicule of his works by a

dwindling group of elderly conventional critics merely stung into more frenzied laudation an ever-widening circle of youthful admirers. Ibsen represented, for a time almost exclusively, "serious" aims in literature, and with those of Herbert Spencer, and in less measure of Zola, and a little later of Nietzsche, his books were the spiritual food of all youthful minds of any vigor or elasticity.

In Sweden, at this time, the admiration for Ibsen took forms of almost preposterous violence. The great Swedish novelist, Gustaf af Geijerstam, has given a curious and amusing account of the rage for Ibsen which came to its height about 1880. The question which every student asked his friend, every lover his mistress, was "What do you think of Ibsen?" Not to be a believer in the Norwegian master was a reef upon which love or friendship might easily be shipwrecked. It was quoted gravely as an insufferable incompatibility for the state of marriage. There was a curious and secret symbolism running through the whole of youthful Swedish society, from which their elders were cunningly excluded, by which the volumes of Ibsen, passed from hand to hand, presented on solemn occasions, became the emblems of the problems interesting to generous youth, flags carried in the moral fight for liberty and truth. The three Northern countries, in

their long stagnation, had become clogged and deadened with spiritual humbug, which had sealed the sources of emotion. It seemed as though, after the long frost of the seventies, spring had come and literature had budded at last, and that it was Ibsen who had blown the clarion of the West Wind and heralded the emancipation.

The enthusiasm for the Norwegian dramatist was not always according to knowledge, and sometimes it took grotesque forms. Much of the abuse showered in England and France upon Ibsen at the time we are now describing was due to echoes of the extravagance of his Scandinavian and German idolaters. A Swedish satirist[1] said that if Ibsen could have foreseen how many "misunderstood" women would leave their homes in imitation of Nora, and how many lovesick housekeepers drink poison on account of Rebecca, he would have thrown ashes on his head and have retreated into the deserts of Tartary. The suicide of the novelist, Ernst Ahlgren, was the tragic circumstance where much was so purely comic. But if there were elements of tragi-comedy in the Ibsen idolatry, there were far more important elements of vigorous and wholesome intellectual independence; and it was during this

[1] "Stella Kleve" (Mathilda Malling), in *Framat* (1886).

period of Ibsen's almost hectic popularity that the foundations of a new fiction and a new drama were laid in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. A whole generation sucked strength and energy from his early writings, since it is to be remarked that, from 1880 to 1890, the great prestige of Ibsen did not depend so much on the dramas he was then producing, as on the earlier works of his poetic youth, now reread with an unexampled fervor. So, with us, the tardy popularity of Robert Browning, which faintly resembles that of Ibsen, did not attract the younger generation to the volumes which succeeed *The Ring and the Book*, but sent them back to the books which their fathers had despised, to *Pippa Passes* and *Men and Women*. To the generation of 1880, Ibsen was not so much the author of the realistic social dramas as of those old but now rediscovered miracles of poetry and wit, *The Pretenders*, *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*.

In 1889 Ibsen had been made very pleasantly conscious of this strong personal feeling in his favor among young men and women. Nor did he find it confined to Scandinavia. He had travelled about in Germany, and everywhere his plays were being acted. Berlin was wild about him; at Weimar he was fêted like a conqueror. He did not settle down at Munich until May, and

here, as we have seen, he stayed all the summer, hard at work. After the success of *Hedda Gabler*, which overpowered all adverse comment, Ibsen began to long to be in Norway again, and this feeling was combined, in a curious way, with a very powerful emotion which now entered into his life. He had lived a retired and peaceful existence, mainly a spectator at the feast, as little occupied in helping himself to the dishes which he saw others enjoy as is an eremite in the desert in plucking the grape-clusters of his dreams. No adventure, of any prominent kind, had ever been seen to diversify Ibsen's perfectly decorous and domestic career. And now he was more than sixty, and the gray tones were gathering round him more thickly than ever, when a real ray of vermilion descended out of the sky and filled his horizon with color.

In the season of 1889, among the summer boarders at Gossensass, there appeared a young Viennese lady of eighteen, Miss Emilie Bardach. She used to sit on a certain bench in the Pferchthal, and when the poet, whom she adored from afar, passed by, she had the courage to smile at him. Strange to say, her smile was returned, and soon Ibsen was on the bench at her side. He readily discovered where she lived; no less readily he gained an introduction to the family with whom

she boarded. There was a window-seat in the *salle à manger;* it was deep and shaded by odorous flowering shrubs; it lent itself to endless conversation. The episode was strange, the passion improbable, incomprehensible, profoundly natural and true. Perhaps, until they parted in the last days of September, neither the old man nor the young girl realized what their relations had meant to each. Youth secured its revenge, however; Miss Bardach soon wrote from Vienna that she was now more tranquil, more independent, happy at last. Ibsen, on the other hand, was heart-broken, quivering with ecstasy, overwhelmed with joy and despair.

It was the enigma in his "princess," as he called her, that completed Miss Bardach's sorcery over the old poet. She seems to have been no coquette; she flung her dangerous fascinations at his feet; she broke the thread which bound the charms of her spirit and poured them over him. He, for his part, remaining discreet and respectful, was shattered with happiness. To a friend of mine, a young Norwegian man of letters, Ibsen said about this time: "Oh, you can always love, but I am happier than the happiest, for I am beloved." Long afterwards, on his seventieth birthday, when his own natural force was failing, he wrote to Miss Bardach, "That summer at

Gossensass was the most beautiful and the most harmonious portion of my whole existence. I scarcely venture to think of it, and yet I think of nothing else. Ah! forever!" He did not dare to send her *The Master-Builder*, since her presence interpenetrated every line of it like a perfume, and when, we are told, she sent him her photograph, signed "Princess of Orangia," her too-bold identification of herself with Hilda Wangel hurt him as a rough touch, that finer tact would have avoided. There can be no doubt at all that while she was now largely absorbed by the compliment to her own vanity, he was still absolutely enthralled and bewitched, and that what was fun to her made life and death to him.

This very curious episode,[1] which modifies in several important respects our conception of the dramatist's character, is analogous with the apparent change of disposition which made Renan surprise his unthinking admirers so suddenly at the epoch of *L'Eau de Jouvence* and *L'Abbesse de Jouarre*. It was founded, of course, on that dangerous susceptibility to which an elderly man of genius, whose life had been spent in labor and reflection, may be inclined to re-

[1] It was quite unknown until the correspondence—which has not been translated into English—was published by Georg Brandes at the desire of the lady herself (September, 1906).

sign himself, as he sees the sands running out of the hour-glass, and realizes that in analyzing and dissecting emotion he has never had time to enjoy it. Time is so short, the nerves so fragile and so finite, the dreadful illusion, the *maia*, so irresistible, that the old man gives way to it, and would sooner die at once than not make one grasp at happiness.

It will have been remarked that Ibsen's habit was to store up an impression, but not to use it immediately on creative work. We need, therefore, feel no surprise that there is not a trace of the Bardach episode in *Hedda Gabler*, although the composition of that play immediately followed the *hohes, schmerzliches Glück* at Gossensass. He was, too, no moonlight serenader, and his intense emotion is perfectly compatible with the outline of some of the gossip which was repeated at the time of his death; Ibsen being reported to have said of the Viennese girl: "She did not get hold of me, but I got hold of her—for my play." These things are very complex, and not to be hastily dismissed, especially on the rough and ready English system. There would be give and take in such a complicated situation, when the object was, as Ibsen himself says, out of reach *unversichtbar*. There is no question that for every pang which Hilda made her ancient lover suffer, he would en-

rich his imagination with a dozen points of experience. There is no paradox in saying that the poet was overwhelmed with a passion and yet consciously made it serve as material for his plays. From this time onwards every dramatic work of his bears the stamp of those hours among the roses at Gossensass.

To the spring of 1891 belongs Ibsen's somewhat momentous visit to Vienna, where he was invited by Dr. Max Burckhard, the director of the Burg Theatre, to superintend the performance of his *Pretenders*. Ibsen had already, in strict privacy, visited Vienna, where his plays enjoyed an increasing success, but this was his first public entrance into a city which he admired on the whole more than any other city of Europe. "*Mein schöner Wien!*" he used to murmur, with quite a *élan* of affection. In April, 1891, after the triumph of his tragedy on the stage, Ibsen was the guest at a public banquet at Vienna, when the ovations were overwhelming and were extended until four o'clock next morning. A performance of *The Wild Duck* produced, what was almost as dear to Ibsen as praise, a violent polemic, and he passed on out of a world of storm and passion to Buda-Pesth, where he saw *A Doll's House* acted in Hungarian, amid thunders of applause, and where he was the guest of Count

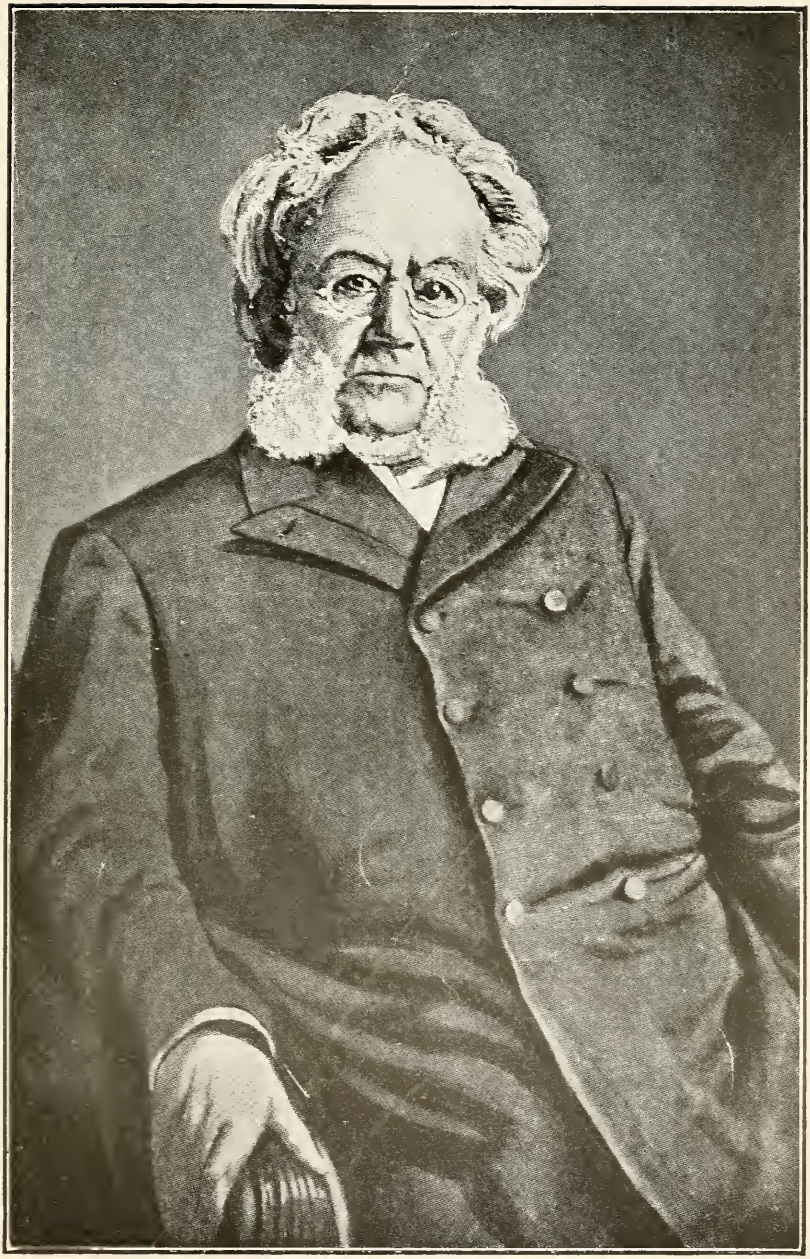
Albert Apponyi. These were the happy and fruitful years which consoled the heart of the poet for the bitter time when

> "Hate's decree
> Dwelt in his thoughts intolerable."

In the ensuing summer, in July, 1891, Ibsen left Munich with every intention of returning to it, but with the plan of a long summer trip in Norway, where the triumphant success of *Hedda Gabler* had been very agreeable to his feelings. Once more he pushed up through the country to Trondhjem, a city which had always attracted him and pleased him. Here he presently embarked on one of the summer coasting-steamers, and saw the shores of Nordland and Finmark for the first time, visiting the North Cape itself. He came back to Christiania for the rest of the season, with no prospect of staying. But he enjoyed a most flattering reception; he was begged to resume his practical citizenship, and he was assured that life in Norway would be made very pleasant to him. In the autumn, therefore, in his abrupt way, he took an apartment in Viktoria Terrasse, and sent to Munich for his furniture. He said to a friend who expressed surprise at this settlement: "I may just as well make Christiania my headquarters as Munich. The railway takes

me in a very short time wherever I want to go; and when I am bored with Norway I can travel elsewhere." But he never felt the fatigue he anticipated, and, but for brief visits to Copenhagen or Stockholm, he left his native country no more after 1891, although he changed his abode in Christiania itself.

For the first twelve months Ibsen enjoyed the pleasures of the prodigal returned, and fed with gusto on the fatted calf. Then, when three years separated him from the illuminating soul-adventures of Gossensass, he began to turn them into a play. It proved to be *The Master-Builder*, and was published before the close of December, 1892, with the date 1893 on the title-page. This play was running for some time in Germany and England before it was played in Scandinavia. But on the evening of March 8, 1893, it was simultaneously given at the National Theatre in Christiania and at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. It was a work which greatly puzzled the critics, and its meaning was scarcely apparent until it had been seen on the stage, for which the oddity of its arrangements are singularly well adapted. It was, however, almost immediately noticed that it marked a new departure in Ibsen's writings. Here was an end of the purely realistic and prosaic social dramas, which had reigned from *The*



Ibsen.

From the painting by Eilif Petersen.

League of Youth to *Hedda Gabler*, and here was a return to the strange and haunting beauty of the old imaginative pieces. Mr. Archer was happily inspired when he spoke of "the pure melody" of the piece, and the best scenes of *The Master-Builder* were heroically and almost recklessly poetical.

This remarkable composition is full of what, for want of a better word, we must call "symbolism." In the conversations between Solness and Hilda much is introduced which is really almost unintelligible unless we take it to be autobiographical. The Master-Builder is one who constructs, not houses, but poems and plays. It is the poet himself who gives expression, in the pathetic and erratic confessions of Solness, to his doubts, his craven timidities, his selfish secrets, and his terror at the uniformity of his "luck." It is less easy to see exactly what Ibsen believed himself to be presenting to us in the enigmatical figure of Hilda, so attractive and genial, so exquisitely refreshing, and yet radically so cruel and superficial. She is perhaps conceived as a symbol of Youth, arriving too late within the circle which Age has trodden for its steps to walk in, and luring it too rashly, by the mirage of happiness, into paths no longer within its physical and moral capacity. "Hypnotism," Mr. Archer tells us,

"is the first and last word of the dramatic action"; perhaps thought-transference more exactly expresses the idea, but I should not have stated even this quite so strongly. The ground of the dramatic action seems to me to be the balance of Nemesis, the fatal necessity that those who enjoy exceptional advantages in life shall pay for them by not less exceptional, but perhaps less obvious, disadvantages. The motto of the piece —at least of the first two of its acts—might be the couplet of the French tragedian:—

C'est un ordre des dieux qui jamais ne se rompt
De nous vendre bien cher les grands biens qu'ils nous font.

Beneath this, which we may call the transcendental aspect of the play, we find a solid and objective study of the self-made man, the headstrong amateur, who has never submitted to the wholesome discipline of professional training, but who has trusted to the help of those trolls or mascots, his native talent and his unfailing "luck." Upon such a man descends Hilda, the disorganizer, who pierces the armor of his conceit by a direct appeal to his passions. Solness has been the irresistible sorcerer, through his good fortune, but he is not protected in his climacteric against this unexpected attack upon the senses. Samson philanders with Delila, and discovers that

his strength is shorn from him. There is no doubt that Ibsen intended in *The Master-Builder* a searching examination of "luck" and the tyranny of it, the terrible effects of it on the Broviks and the Kajas whom nobody remembers, but whose bodies lie under the wheels of its car. The dramatic situation is here extremely interesting; it consists in the fact that Solness, who breaks every one else, is broken by Hilda. The inherent hardness of youth, which makes no allowances, which demands its kingdom here and now upon the table, was never more powerfully depicted. Solness is smashed by his impact with Hilda, as china is against a stone. In all this it would be a mistake to see anything directly autobiographical, although so much in the character and position of Solness may remind us, legitimately enough, of Ibsen himself, and his adventures.

The personal record of Ibsen in these years is almost silent. He was growing old and set in his habits. He was growing rich, too, and he surrounded himself with sedentary comforts. His wealth, it may here be said, was founded entirely upon the success of his works, but was fostered by his extreme adroitness as a man of business. Those who are so fond of saying that any man of genius might have excelled in some other capacity are fully justified if they like to imagine Ibsen as

the model financier. He certainly possessed a remarkable aptitude for affairs, and we learn that his speculations were at once daring and crafty. People who are weary of commiserating the poverty of poets may be pleased to learn that when Ibsen died he was one of the wealthiest private citizens of Christiania, and this was wholly in consequence of the care he had taken in protecting his copyrights and administering his receipts. If the melancholy couplet is correct which tells us that

> Aux petits des oiseaux Dieu donne la pâture,
> Mais sa bonté s'arrête à la littérature,

we must believe, with Ibsen's enemies, that his fortunes were not under the divine protection.

The actual numbers of each of his works printed since he first published with Hegel in Copenhagen—a connection which he preserved without a breach until the end—have been stated since his death. They contain some points of interest. After 1876 Hegel ventured on large editions of each new play, but they went off at first slowly. *The Lady from the Sea* was the earliest to appear, at once, in an issue of 10,000 copies, which was soon exhausted. So great, however, had the public interest in Ibsen become in 1894 that the edition of 10,000 copies of *Little Eyolf* was found quite

inadequate to meet the first order, and it was enlarged to 15,000, all of which were gone in a fortnight. This circulation in so small a reading public as that of Denmark and Norway was unprecedented, and it must be remembered that the simultaneous translations into most of the languages of Europe are not included.

Little Eyolf, which was written in Christiania during the spring and summer of 1894, was issued, according to Ibsen's cometary custom, as the second week of December rolled round. The reception of it was stormy, even in Scandinavia, and led to violent outbursts of controversy. No work from the master's pen had roused more difference of opinion among the critics since the bluster over *Ghosts* fourteen years before. Those who prefer to absolute success in the creation of a work of art the personal flavor or perfume of the artist himself were predisposed to place *Little Eyolf* very high among his writings. Nowhere is he more independent of all other influences, nowhere more intensely, it may even be said more distressingly, himself. From many points of view this play may fairly be considered in the light of a *tour de force*. Ibsen—one would conjecture—is trying to see to what extremities of agile independence he can force his genius. The word "force" has escaped me; but it may

be retained as reproducing that sense of a difficulty not quite easily or completely overcome which *Little Eyolf* produces. To mention but one technical matter; there are but four characters, properly speaking, in the play—since Eyolf himself and the Rat-Wife are but illustrations or symbolic properties—and of these four, one (Borgheim) is wholly subsidiary. Ibsen, then, may be said to have challenged imitation by composing a drama of passion with only three characters in it. By a process of elimination this has been done by Æschylus (in the *Agamemnon*), by Racine (in *Phédre* and *Andromaque*), and in our own day by Maeterlinck (in *Pelléas et Mélisande*). But Ibsen was accustomed to a wider field, and his experiment seems not wholly successful. *Little Eyolf*, at least, is, from all points of view, an exercise on the tight-rope. We may hazard the conjecture that no drama gave Ibsen more satisfaction to write, but for enjoyment the reader may prefer less prodigious agility on the trapeze.

If we turn from the technical virtuosity of *Little Eyolf* to its moral aspects, we find it a very dreadful play, set in darkness which nothing illuminates but the twinkling sweetness of Asta. The mysterious symbol of the Rat-Wife breaks in upon the pair whose love is turning to hate, the man waxing cold as the wife grows hot. The

Angel of God, in the guise of an old beggar-woman, descends into their garden, and she drags away, by an invisible chain, "the little gnawing thing," the pathetic lame child. The effect on the pair of Eyolf's death by drowning is the subject of the subsequent acts. In Rita jealousy is incarnate, and she seems the most vigorous, and, it must be added, the most repulsive, of Ibsen's feminine creations. The reckless violence of Rita's energy, indeed, interpreted by a competent actress—played, for instance, as it was in London most admirably by Miss Achurch—is almost too painful for a public exhibition, and to the old criticism, "nec pueros coram populo Medea trucidet," if a pedant chooses to press it, there seems no reply. The sex question, as treated in *Little Eyolf*, recalls *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) of Tolstoi. When, however, I ventured to ask Ibsen whether there was anything in this, he was displeased, and stoutly denied it. What an author denies, however, is not always evidence.

Nothing further of general interest happened to Ibsen until 1896, when he sat down to compose another drama, *John Gabriel Borkman*. This was a study of the mental adventures of a man of high commercial imagination, who is artificially parted from all that contact with real affairs which keeps such energy on the track, and

who goes mad with dreams of incalculable power, a study, in fact, of financial megalomania. It was said, at the time, that Ibsen was originally led to make this analysis of character from reading in the Christiania newspapers a report of the failure and trial of a notorious speculator convicted of fraud in 1895, and sentenced to a long period of penal servitude.

Whether this be so or not, we have in the person of John Gabriel Borkman a prominent example of the ninteenth-century type of criminous speculator, in whom the vastness of view and the splendidly altruistic audacity present themselves as elements which render it exceedingly difficult to say how far the malefactor is morally responsible for his crime. He has imagined, and to a certain point has carried out, a monster metal "trust," for the success of which he lacks neither courage nor knowledge nor practical administrative capacity, but only that trifling concomitant, sufficiency of capital. To keep the fires blazing until his vast model is molten into the mould, he helps himself to money here, there, and everywhere, scarcely giving a thought to his responsibilities, so certain is he of ultimate and beneficent triumph. He will make rich beyond the dreams of avarice all these his involuntary supporters. Unhappily, just before his scheme is ready and the metal runs,

he is stopped by the stupidity of the law, and finds himself in prison.

Side by side with this study of commercial madness runs a thread of that new sense of the preciousness of vital joy which had occupied Ibsen so much ever since the last of the summers at Gossensass. The figure of Erhart Borkman is a very interesting one to the theatrical student. In the ruin of the family, all hopes concentre in him. Every one claims him, and in the bosoms of each of his shattered parents a secret hope is born, Mrs. Borkman believing that by a brilliant career of commercial rectitude her son will wipe out the memory of his father's crime; Borkman, who has never given up the ambition of returning to business, reposing his own hopes on the co-operation of his son.

But Erhart Borkman disappoints them all. He will be himself, he will enjoy his life, he will throw off all the burdens both of responsibility and of restitution. He has no ambition and little natural feeling; he simply must be happy, and he suddenly elopes, leaving all their anticipations bankrupt, with a certain joyous Mrs. Wilton, who has nothing but her beauty to recommend her. Deserted thus by the *ignis fatuus* of youth, the collapse of the three old people is complete. Under the shock the brain of Borkman gives way,

and he wanders out into the winter's night, full of vague dreams of what he can still do in the world, if he can only break from his bondage and shatter his dream. He dies there in the snow, and the two old sisters, who have followed him in an anxiety which overcomes their mutual hatred, arrive in time to see him pass away. We leave them in the wood, "a dead man and two shadows" —so Ella Rentheim puts it—"for *that* is what the cold has made of us"; the central moral of the piece being that all the errors of humanity spring from cold-heartedness and neglect of the natural heat of love. That Borkman embezzled money, and reduced hundreds of innocent people to beggary, might be condoned; but there is no pardon for his cruel bargaining for wealth with the soul of Ella Rentheim, since that is the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit. There are points of obscurity, and one or two of positive and even regrettable whimsicality, about *John Gabriel Borkman*, but on the whole it is a work of lofty originality and of poignant human interest.

The veteran was now beginning to be conscious of the approaches of old age, but they were made agreeable to him by many tokens of national homage.

On his seventieth birthday, March 20, 1898, Ibsen received the felicitations of the world. It

is pleasing to relate that a group of admirers in England, a group which included Mr. Asquith, Mr. J. M. Barrie, Mr. Thomas Hardy, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, Mr. Pinero and Mr. Bernard Shaw took part in these congratulations and sent Ibsen a handsome set of silver plate, this being an act which, it had been discovered, he particularly appreciated. The bearer of this gift was the earliest of the long stream of visitors to arrive on the morning of the poet's birthday, and he found Ibsen in company with his wife, his son, his son's wife (Björnson's daughter), and his little grandson, Tankred. The poet's surprise and pleasure were emphatic. A deputation from the Storthing, headed by the Leader of the House, deputations representing the University, the various Christiania Theatres, and other official or academic bodies arrived at intervals during the course of the day; and all the afternoon Ibsen was occupied in taking these hundreds of visitors, in parties, up to the case containing the English tribute, in showing the objects and in explaining their origin. There could be no question that the gift gave genuine pleasure to the recipient; it was the first, as it was to be the last, occasion on which any public testimony to English appreciation of his genius found its way to Ibsen's door.

Immediately after the birthday festivities, which

it was observed had fatigued him, Ibsen started on a visit to Copenhagen, where he was received by the aged King of Denmark, and to Stockholm, where he was overpowered with ovations from all classes. There can be no doubt that this triumphal progress, though deeply grateful to the aged poet's susceptibilities, made a heavy drain upon his nervous resources. When he returned to Norway, indeed, he was concealed from all visitors at his physician's orders, and it is understood that he had some kind of seizure. It was whispered that he would write no more, and the biennial drama, due in December, 1898, did not make its appearance. His stores of health, however, were not easily exhausted; he rested for several months, and then he was seen once more in Carl Johans Gade, smiling in his usual way, and entirely recovered. It was announced that winter that he was writing his reminiscences, but nothing more was heard of any such book.

He was able to take a vivid interest in the preparations for the National Norwegian Theatre in Christiania, which was finally opened by the King of Sweden and Norway on September 1, 1899. Early in the morning, colossal bronze statues of Ibsen and Björnson were unveiled in front of the theatre, and the poets, now, unfortunately, again not on the best of terms, were seen

making vast détours for the purpose of satisfying their curiosity, and yet not meeting one another in flesh or in metal. The first night, to prevent rivalry, was devoted to antiquarianism, and to the performance of extracts from the plays of Holberg. Ibsen and Björnson occupied the centre of the dress circle, sitting uplifted in two gilded fauteuils and segregated by a vast garland of red and white roses. They were the objects of universal attention, and the King seemed never to have done smiling and bowing to the two most famous of his Norwegian subjects.

The next night was Ibsen's fête, and he occupied, alone, the manager's box. A poem in his honor, by Niels Collett Vogt, was recited by the leading actor, who retired, and then rushed down the empty stage, with his arms extended, shouting "Long live Henrik Ibsen." The immense audience started to its feet and repeated the words over and over again with deafening fervor. The poet appeared to be almost overwhelmed with emotion and pleasure; at length, with a gesture which was quite pathetic, smiling through his tears, he seemed to beg his friends to spare him, and the plaudits slowly ceased. *An Enemy of the People* was then admirably performed. At the close of every act Ibsen was called to the front of his box, and when the

performance was over, and the actors had been thanked, the audience turned to him again with a sort of affectionate ferocity. Ibsen was found to have stolen from his box, but he was waylaid and forcibly carried back to it. On his reappearance, the whole theatre rose in a roar of welcome, and it was with difficulty that the aged poet, now painfully exhausted from the strain of an evening of such prolonged excitement, could persuade the public to allow him to withdraw. At length he left the theatre, walking slowly, bowing and smiling, down a lane cleared for him, far into the street, through the dense crowd of his admirers. This astonishing night, September 2, 1899, was the climax of Ibsen's career.

During all this time Ibsen was secretly at work on another drama, which he intended as the epilogue to his earlier dramatic work, or at least to all that he had written since *The Pillars of Society*. This play, which was his latest, appeared, under the title of *When We Dead Awaken*, in December, 1899 (with 1900 on the title-page). It was simultaneously published, in very large editions, in all the principal languages of Europe, and it was acted also, but it is impossible to deny that, whether in the study or on the boards, it proved a disappointment. It displayed, especially in its later acts, many obvious signs of the weakness incident on old age.

When it is said that *When We Dead Awaken* was not worthy of its predecessors, it should be explained that no falling off was visible in the technical cleverness with which the dialogue was built up, nor in the wording of particular sentences. Nothing more natural or amusing, nothing showing greater command of the resources of the theatre, had ever been published by Ibsen himself than the opening act of *When We Dead Awaken.* But there was certainly in the whole conception a cloudiness, an ineffectuality, which was very little like anything that Ibsen had displayed before. The moral of the piece was vague, the evolution of it incoherent, and indeed in many places it seemed a parody of his earlier manner. Not Mr. Anstey Guthrie's inimitable scenes in *Mr. Punch's Ibsen* were more preposterous than almost all the appearances of Irene after the first act of *When We Dead Awaken.*

It is Irene who describes herself as dead, but awakening in the society of Rubek, whilst Maia, the little gay soulless creature whom the great sculptor has married, and has got heartily tired of, goes up to the mountains with Ulpheim the hunter, in pursuit of the free joy of life. At the close, the assorted couples are caught on the summit of an exceeding high mountain by a snowstorm, which opens to show Rubek and Irene

"whirled along with the masses of snow and buried in them," while Maia and her bear-hunter escape in safety to the plains. Interminable, and often very sage and penetrating, but always essentially rather maniacal, conversation fills up the texture of the play, which is certainly the least successful of Ibsen's mature compositions. The boredom of Rubek in the midst of his eminence and wealth, and his conviction that by working in such concentration for the purity of art he merely wasted his physical life, inspire the portions of the play which bring most conviction and can be read with fullest satisfaction. It is obvious that such thoughts, such faint and unavailing regrets, pursued the old age of Ibsen; and the profound wound that his heart had received so long before at Gossensass was unhealed to his last moments of consciousness. An excellent French critic, M. P. G. La Chesnais, has ingeniously considered the finale of this play as a confession that Ibsen, at this end of his career, was convinced of the error of his earlier rigor, and, having ceased to believe in his mission, regretted the complete sacrifice of his life to his work. But perhaps it is not necessary to go into such subtleties. *When We Dead Awaken* is the production of a very tired old man, whose physical powers were declining.

In the year 1900, during our South African War, sentiment in the Scandinavian countries was very generally ranged on the side of the Boers. Ibsen, however, expressed himself strongly and publicly in favor of the English position. In an interview (November 24, 1900), which produced a considerable sensation, he remarked that the Boers were but half-cultivated, and had neither the will nor the power to advance the cause of civilization. Their sole object had come to be a jealous exclusion of all the higher forms of culture. The English were merely taking what the Boers themselves had stolen from an earlier race; the Boers had pitilessly hunted their precursors out of house and home, and now they were tasting the same cup themselves. These were considerations which had not occurred to generous sentimentalists in Norway, and Ibsen's defence of England, which he supported in further communications with irony and courage, made a great sensation, and threw cold water on the pro-Boer sentimentalists. In Holland, where Ibsen had a wide public, this want of sympathy for Dutch prejudice raised a good deal of resentment, and Ibsen's statements were replied to by the fiery young journalist, Cornelius Karel Elout, who even published a book on the subject. Ibsen took dignified notice of Elout's attacks (December 9,

1900), repeating his defence of English policy, and this was the latest of his public appearances.

He took an interest, however, in the preparation of the great edition of his *Collected Works*, which appeared in Copenhagen in 1901 and 1902, in ten volumes. Before the publication of the latest of these, however, Ibsen had suffered from an apoplectic stroke, from which he never wholly recovered. It was believed that any form of mental fatigue might now be fatal to him, and his life was prolonged by extreme medical care. He was contented in spirit and even cheerful, but from this time forth he was more and more completely withdrawn from consecutive interest in what was going on in the world without. The publication, in succession, of his juvenile works (*Kæmpehöjen*, *Olaf Liljekrans*, both edited by Halvdan Koht, in 1902), of his *Correspondence*, edited by Koht and Julius Elias, in 1904, of the bibliographical edition of his collected works by Carl Nærup, in 1902, left him indifferent and scarcely conscious. The gathering darkness was broken, it is said, by a gleam of light in 1905; when the freedom of Norway and the accession of King Håkon were explained to him, he was able to express his joyful approval before the cloud finally sank upon his intelligence.

During his long illness Ibsen was troubled by

aphasia, and he expressed himself painfully, now in broken Norwegian, now in still more broken German. His unhappy hero, Oswald Alving, in *Ghosts*, had thrilled the world by his cry, "Give me the sun, Mother!" and now Ibsen, with glassy eyes, gazed at the dim windows, murmuring "Keine Sonne, keine Sonne, keine Sonne!" At the table where all the works of his maturity had been written the old man sat, persistently learning and forgetting the alphabet. "Look!" he said to Julius Elias, pointing to his mournful pot-hooks, "See what I am doing! I am sitting here and learning my letters—my *letters!* I who was once a Writer!" Over this shattered image of what Ibsen had been, over this dying lion, who could not die, Mrs. Ibsen watched with the devotion of wife, mother and nurse in one, through six pathetic years. She was rewarded, in his happier moments, by the affection and tender gratitude of her invalid, whose latest articulate words were addressed to her—"*min söde, kjære, snille frue*" (my sweet, dear, good wife); and she taught to adore their grandfather the three children of a new generation, Tankred, Irene, Eleonora.

Ibsen preserved the habit of walking about his room, or standing for hours staring out of window, until the beginning of May, 1906. Then a more

complete decay confined him to his bed. After several days of unconsciousness, he died very peacefully in his house on Drammensvej, opposite the Royal Gardens of Christiania, at half-past two in the afternoon of May 23, 1906, being in his seventy-ninth year. By a unanimous vote of the Storthing he was awarded a public funeral, which the King of Norway attended in person, while King Edward VII was represented there by the British Minister. The event was regarded throughout Norway as a national ceremony of the highest solemnity and importance, and the poet who had suffered such bitter humiliation and neglect in his youth was carried to his grave in solemn splendor, to the sound of a people's lamentation.

CHAPTER IX

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

During the latest years of his life, which were spent as a wealthy and prosperous citizen of Christiania, the figure of Ibsen took forms of legendary celebrity which were equalled by no other living man of letters, not even by Tolstoi, and which had scarcely been surpassed, among the dead, by Victor Hugo. When we think of the obscurity of his youth and middle age, and of his consistent refusal to advertise himself by any of the little vulgar arts of self-exhibition, this extreme publicity is at first sight curious, but it can be explained. Norway is a small and a new country, inordinately, perhaps, but justly and gracefully proud of those—an Ole Bull, a Frithjof Nansen, an Edvard Grieg—who spread through the world evidences of its spiritual life. But the one who was more original, more powerful, more interesting than any other of her sons, had persistently kept aloof from the soil of Norway, and was at length recaptured and shut up in a golden cage with more expenditure of

delicate labor than any perverse canary or escaped macaw had ever needed. Ibsen safely housed in Christiania!—it was the recovery of an important national asset, the resumption, after years of vexation and loss, of the intellectual regalia of Norway.

Ibsen, then—recaptured, though still in a frame of mind which left the captors nervous—was naturally an object of pride. For the benefit of the hundreds of tourists who annually pass through Christiania, it was more than tempting, it was irresistible to point out, in slow advance along Carl Johans Gade, in permanent silence at a table in the Grand Café, "our greatest citizen." To this species of demonstration Ibsen unconsciously lent himself by his immobility, his regularity of habits, his solemn taciturnity. He had become more like a strange physical object than like a man among men. He was visible broadly and quietly, not conversing, rarely moving, quite isolated and self-contained, a recognized public spectacle, delivered up, as though bound hand and foot, to the kodak-hunter and the maker of "spicy" paragraphs. That Ibsen was never seen to do anything, or heard to say anything, that those who boasted of being intimate with him obviously lied in their teeth—all this prepared him for sacrifice. Christiania is a hot-bed of gossip,

and its press one of the most "chatty" in the world. Our "greatest living author" was offered up as a wave-offering, and he smoked daily on the altar of the newspapers.

It will be extremely rash of the biographers of the future to try to follow Ibsen's life day by day in the Christiania press from, let us say, 1891 to 1901. During that decade he occupied the reporters immensely, and he was particularly useful to the active young men who telegraph "chat" to Copenhagen, Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Berlin. Snapshots of Ibsen, dangerous illness of the playwright, quaint habits of the Norwegian dramatist, a poet's double life, anecdotes of Ibsen and Mrs. ——, rumors of the King's attitude to Ibsen—this pollenta, dressed a dozen ways, was the standing dish at every journalist's table. If a space needed filling, a very rude reply to some fatuous question might be fitted in and called "Instance of Ibsen's Wit." The crop of fable was enormous, and always seemed to find a gratified public, for whom nothing was too absurd if it was supposed to illustrate "our great national poet." Ibsen, meanwhile, did nothing at all. He never refuted a calumny, never corrected a story, but he threw an ironic glance through his gold-rimmed spectacles as he strolled down Carl Johan with his hands behind his back.

His personal appearance, it must be admitted, formed a tempting basis upon which to build a legend. His force of will had gradually transfigured his bodily forms until he thoroughly looked the part which he was expected to fill. At the age of thirty, to judge by the early photographs, he had been a commonplace-looking little man, with a shock of coal-black hair and a full beard, one of those hirsute types common in the Teutonic races, which may prove, on inquiry, to be painter, musician, or engraver, or possibly engineer, but less probably poet. Then came the exile from Norway, and the residence in Rome, marked by a little bust which stands before me now, where the beard is cut away into two round whiskers so as to release the firm round chin, and the long upper lip is clean-shaved. Here there is more liveliness, but still no distinction. Then comes a further advance—a photograph (in which I feel a tender pride, for it was made to please me) taken in Dresden (October 15, 1873), where the brow, perfectly smooth and white, has widened out, the whiskers have become less chubby, and the small, scrutinizing eyes absolutely sparkle with malice. Here, you say at last, is no poet, indeed, but an unusually cultivated banker or surprisingly adroit solicitor. Here the hair, retreating from the great forehead, begins to curl and roll with a distin-

Bust of Ibsen, about 1865.

guished wildness; here the long mouth, like a slit in the face, losing itself at each end in whisker, is a symbol of concentrated will power, a drawer in some bureau, containing treasures, firmly locked up.

Then came Munich, where Ibsen's character underwent very considerable changes, or rather where its natural features became fixed and emphasized. We are not left without precious indication of his gestures and his looks at this time, when he was a little past the age of fifty. Where so much has been extravagantly written, or described in a journalistic key of false emphasis, great is the value of a quiet portrait by one of those who has studied Ibsen most intelligently. It is perhaps the most careful pen-sketch of him in any language.

Mr. William Archer, then, has given the following account of his first meeting with Ibsen. It was in the Scandinavia Club, in Rome, at the close of 1881:—

I had been about a quarter of an hour in the room, and was standing close to the door, when it opened, and in glided an undersized man with very broad shoulders and a large, leonine head, wearing a long black frock-coat with very broad lapels, on one of which a knot of red ribbon was conspicuous. I knew him at once, but was a little taken aback by his low stature. In spite of all the famous instances to

the contrary, one instinctively associates greatness with size. His natural height was even somewhat diminished by a habit of bending forward slightly from the waist, begotten, no doubt, of short-sightedness, and the need to peer into things. He moved very slowly and noiselessly, with his hands behind his back—an unobtrusive personality, which would have been insignificant had the head been strictly proportionate to the rest of the frame. But there was nothing insignificant about the high and massive forehead, crowned with a mane of (then) iron-gray hair, the small and pale but piercing eyes behind the gold-rimmed spectacles, or the thin-lipped mouth, depressed at the corners into a curve indicative of iron will, and set between bushy whiskers of the same dark gray as the hair. The most cursory observer could not but recognize power and character in the head; yet one would scarcely have guessed it to be the power of a poet, the character of a prophet. Misled, perhaps, by the ribbon at the buttonhole, and by an expression of reserve, almost of secretiveness, in the lines of the tight-shut mouth, one would rather have supposed one's self face to face with an eminent statesman or diplomatist.

With the further advance of years all that was singular in Ibsen's appearance became accentuated. The hair and beard turned snowy white; the former rose in a fierce sort of Oberland, the latter was kept square and full, crossing underneath the truculent chin that escaped from it. As Ibsen walked to a banquet in Christiania, he looked quite small under the blaze of crosses, stars and belts which he displayed when he un-

buttoned the long black overcoat which enclosed him tightly. Never was he seen without his hands behind him, and the poet Holger Drachmann started a theory that as Ibsen could do nothing in the world but write, the Muse tied his wrists together at the small of his back whenever they were not actually engaged in composition. His regularity in all habits, his mechanical ways, were the subject of much amusement. He must sit day after day in the same chair, at the same table, in the same corner of the café, and woe to the ignorant intruder who was accidentally beforehand with him. No word was spoken, but the indignant poet stood at a distance, glaring, until the stranger should be pierced with embarrassment, and should rise and flee away.

Ibsen had the reputation of being dangerous and difficult of access. But the evidence of those who knew him best point to his having been phlegmatic rather than morose. He was "umbrageous," ready to be discomposed by the action of others, but, if not vexed or startled, he was elaborately courteous. He had a great dislike of any abrupt movement, and if he was startled, he had the instinct of a wild animal, to bite. It was a pain to him to have the chain of his thoughts suddenly broken, and he could not bear to be addressed by chance acquaintances

in street or café. When he was resident in Munich and Dresden, the difficulty of obtaining an interview with Ibsen was notorious. His wife protected him from strangers, and if her defences broke down, and the stranger contrived to penetrate the inner fastness, Ibsen might suddenly appear in the doorway, half in a rage, half quivering with distress, and say, in heart-rending tones, "Bitte um Arbeitsruhe"—"Please let me work in peace!" They used to tell how in Munich a rich baron, who was the local Mæcenas of letters, once bored Ibsen with a long recital of his love affairs, and ended by saying, with a wonderful air of fatuity, "To you, Master, I come, because of your unparalleled knowledge of the female heart. In your hands I place my fate. Advise me, and I will follow your advice." Ibsen snapped his mouth and glared through his spectacles; then in a low voice of concentrated fury he said: "Get home, and—go to bed!" whereat his noble visitor withdrew, clothed with indignation as with a garment.

His voice was uniform, soft and quiet. The bitter things he said seemed the bitterer for his gentle way of saying them. As his shape grew burly and his head of hair enormous, the smallness of his extremities became accentuated. His little hands were always folded away as he tripped

upon his tiny feet. His movements were slow and distrait. He wasted few words on the current incidents of life, and I was myself the witness, in 1899, of his *sang-froid* under distressing circumstances. Ibsen was descending a polished marble staircase when his feet slipped and he fell swiftly, precipitately, downward. He must have injured himself severely, he might have been killed, if two young gentlemen had not darted forward below and caught him in their arms. Once more set the right way up, Ibsen softly thanked his saviours with much frugality of phrase—"Tak, mine Herrer!"—tenderly touched an abraded surface of his top-hat, and marched forth homeward, unperturbed.

His silence had a curious effect on those in whose company he feasted; it seemed to hypnotise them. The great Danish actress, Mrs. Heiberg, herself the wittiest of talkers, said that to sit beside Ibsen was to peer into a gold-mine and not catch a glitter from the hidden treasure. But his dumbness was not so bitterly ironical as it was popularly supposed to be. It came largely from a very strange passivity which made definite action unwelcome to him. He could never be induced to pay visits, yet he would urge his wife and his son to accept invitations, and when they returned he would insist on being told every par-

ticular—who was there, what was said, even what everybody wore. He never went to a theatre or concert-room, except on the very rare occasions when he could be induced to be present at the performance of his own plays. But he was extremely fond of hearing about the stage. He had a memory for little things and an observation of trifles which was extraordinary. He thought it amazing that people could go into a room and not notice the pattern of the carpet, the color of the curtains, the objects on the walls; these being details which he could not help observing and retaining. This trait comes out in his copious and minute stage directions.

Ibsen was simplicity itself; no man was ever less affected. But his character was closed; he was perpetually on the defensive. He was seldom confidential, he never "gave way"; his emotions and his affections were genuine, but his heart was a fenced city. He had little sense of domestic comfort; his rooms were bare and neat, with no personal objects save those which belonged to his wife. Even in the days of his wealth, in the fine house on Drammensvej, there was a singular absence of individuality about his dwelling rooms. They might have been prepared for a rich American traveller in some hotel. Through a large portion of his career in Germany he lived in fur-

nished rooms, not because he did not possess furniture of his own, which was stored up, but because he paid no sort of homage to his own penates. He had friends, but he did not cultivate them; he rather permitted them, at intervals, to cultivate him. To Georg Brandes (March 6, 1870) he wrote: "Friends are a costly luxury; and when one has devoted one's self wholly to a profession and a mission here in life, there is no place left for friends." The very charming story of Ibsen's throwing his arms round old Hans Christian Andersen's neck, and forcing him to be genial and amiable,[1] is not inconsistent with the general rule of passivity and shyness which he preserved in matters of friendship.

Ibsen's reading was singularly limited. In his fine rooms on Drammensvej I remember being struck by seeing no books at all, except the large Bible which always lay at his side, and formed his constant study. He disliked having his partiality for the Bible commented on, and if, as would sometimes be the case, religious people expressed pleasure at finding him deep in the sacred volume, Ibsen would roughly reply: "It is only for the sake of the language." He was the enemy of anything which seemed to approach cant and pretension, and he concealed his own views as

[1] *Samliv med Ibsen.*

closely as he desired to understand the views of others. He possessed very little knowledge of literature. The French he despised and repudiated, although he certainly had studied Voltaire with advantage; of the Italians he knew only Dante and of the English only Shakespeare, both of whom he had studied in translations. In Danish he read and reread Holberg, who throughout his life unquestionably remained Ibsen's favorite author; he preserved a certain admiration for the Danish classics of his youth: Heiberg, Hertz, Schack-Steffelt. In German, the foreign language which he read most currently, he was strangely ignorant of Schiller and Heine, and hostile to Goethe, although *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* must owe something of their form to *Faust*. But the German poets whom he really enjoyed were two dramatists of the age preceding his own, Otto Ludwig (1813–65) and Friedrich Hebbel (1813–63). Each of these playwrights had been occupied in making certain reforms, of a realistic tendency, in the existing tradition of the stage, and each of them dealt, before any one else in Europe did so, with "problems" on the stage. These two German poets, but Hebbel particularly, passed from romanticism to realism, and so on to mysticism, in a manner fascinating to Ibsen, whom it is possible that they in-

fluenced.[1] He remained, in later years, persistently ignorant of Zola, and of Tolstoi he had read, with contemptuous disapproval, only some of the polemical pamphlets. He said to me, in 1899, of the great Russian: "Tolstoi?—he is mad!" with a screwing up of the features such as a child makes at the thought of a black draught.

If he read at all, it was poetry. His indifference to music was complete; he had, in fact, no ear whatever, and could not distinguish one tune from another. His efforts to appreciate the music which Grieg made for *Peer Gynt* were pathetic. But for verse his sense was exceedingly delicate, and the sound of poetry gave him acute pleasure. At times, when his nerves were overstrained, he was fatigued by the riot of rhymes which pursued him through his dreams, and which his memory vainly strove to recapture. For academic philosophy and systems of philosophic thought he had a great impatience. The vexed question of what he owed to the eminent Danish philosopher, Sören Kierkegaard, has never been solved. Brandes has insisted, again and again, on the close relation between *Brand* and other works of Ibsen and the famous *Either-Or* of Kierkegaard; "it

[1] It would be interesting to compare *Die Niebelungen*, the trilogy which Hebbel published in 1862, in which the struggle between pagan and Christian ideals of conduct is analyzed, with Ibsen's *Emperor and Galilean*.

actually seems," he says, "as though Ibsen had aspired to the honor of being called Kierkegaard's poet." Ibsen, however, aspired to no such honor, and, while he never actually denied the influence, the relation between him and the philosopher seems to be much rather one of parallelism than of imitation. Ibsen was a poetical psychologist of the first order, but he could not bring himself to read the prose of the professional thinkers.

In his attitude both to philosophical and poetical literature Ibsen is with such apparently remote figures as Guy de Maupassant and Shelley; in his realism and his mysticism he is unrelated to immediate predecessors, and has no wish to be a disciple of the dead. His extreme interest in the observation of ethical problems is not identified with any curiosity about what philosophical writers have said on similar subjects. Weininger has pointed out that Ibsen's philosophy is radically the same as that of Kant, yet there is no evidence that Ibsen had ever studied or had even turned over the pages of the *Criticism of Pure Reason*. It is not necessary to suppose that he had done so. The peculiar aspect of the Ego as the principal and ultimately sole guide to truth was revealed anew to the Norwegian poet, and references to Kant, or to Fichte, or to Kierkegaard,

seem, therefore, to be beside the mark. The watchword of *Brand*, with his cry of "All or Nothing," his absolute repudiation of compromise, was not a literary conception, but was founded, without the help of books, on a profound contemplation of human nature, mainly, no doubt, as Ibsen found it in himself. But in these days of the tyranny of literature it is curious to meet with an author of the first rank who worked without a library.

Ibsen's study of women was evidently so close, and what he writes about them is usually so penetrating, that many legends have naturally sprung up about the manner in which he gained his experience. Of these, most are pure fiction. As a matter of fact, Ibsen was shy with women, and unless they took the initiative, he contented himself with watching them from a distance and noting their ways in silence. The early flirtation with Miss Rikke Holst at Bergen, which takes so prominent a place in Ibsen's story mainly because such incidents were extremely rare in it, is a typical instance. If this young girl of sixteen had not taken the matter into her own hands, running up the steps of the hotel and flinging her posy of flowers into the face of the young poet, the incident would have closed in his watching her down the street, while the fire smouldered

in his eyes. It was not until her fresh field-blossoms had struck him on the cheek that he was emboldened to follow her and to send her the lyrical roses and auriculas which live forever in his poems. If we wish to note the difference of temperament, we have but to contrast Ibsen's affair with Rikke Holst with Goethe's attitude to Christiana Vulpius; in doing so, we bring the passive and the active lover face to face.

Ibsen would gladly have married his flower of the field, a vision of whose bright, untrammelled adolescence reappears again and again in his works, and plainly in *The Master-Builder*. But he escaped a great danger in failing to secure her as his wife, for Rikke Holst, when she had lost her girlish freshness, would probably have had little character and no culture to fall back upon. He waited, fortunately for his happiness, until he secured Susannah Thoresen. Mrs. Ibsen, his faithful guide, guardian and companion for half a century, will live among the entirely successful wives of difficult men of genius. In the midst of the spiteful gossip of Christiania she had to traverse her *via dolorosa*, for it was part of the fun of the journalists to represent this husband and wife as permanently alienated. That Ibsen was easy to live with is not probable, but his wife not merely contrived to do it, but by her watch-

fulness, her adroitness, and, when necessary, by her firmness of decision, she smoothed the path for the great man whom she adored, and who was to her a great wilful child to be cajoled and circumvented. He was absolutely dependent on her, although he affected amusing airs of independence; and if she absented herself, there were soon cries in the house of "My Cat, My Cat!" the pet name by which he called his wife. Of their domestic ways little is yet known in detail, but everything can be imagined.

To the enigma of Ibsen's character it was believed that his private correspondence might supply a key. His letters were collected and arranged while he was still alive, but he was not any longer in a mental condition which permitted him to offer any help in comment to his editors. His son, Mr. Sigurd Ibsen, superintended the work, and two careful bibliographers, Mr. Halvdan Koht and Mr. Julius Elias, carried out the scheme in two volumes,[1] with the execution of which no fault can be suggested. But the enigma remained unsolved; the sphinx spoke much, but failed to answer the questions we had been asking. These letters, in the first place, suffer from the fact that Ibsen was a relentless destroyer of documents; they are all written by him; not one single example

[1] *Breve fra Henrik Ibsen*, Gyldendalske Boghadel, 1904.

had been preserved of the correspondence to which this is the reply. Then Ibsen's letters, as revealers of the unseen mood, are particularly unsatisfactory. With rare exceptions, he remains throughout them tightly buttoned up in his long and legendary frock-coat. There is no laughter and no tears in his letters; he is occasionally extremely angry, and exudes drops of poison, like the captive scorpion which he caught when he was in Italy, and loved to watch and tease. But there is no self-abandonment, and very little emotion; the letters are principally historical and critical, "finger-posts for commentators." They give valuable information about the genius of his works, but they tell almost less about his inner moral nature than do his imaginative writings.

In his youth the scorpion in Ibsen's heart seems to have stung him occasionally to acts which afterwards filled him with embarrassment. We hear that in his Bergen days he sent to Låding, his fellow-teacher at the theatre, a challenge of which, when the mood was over, he was greatly ashamed. It is said that on another occasion, under the pressure of annoyance, maddened with fear and insomnia, he sprang out of bed in his shirt and tried to throw himself into the sea off one of the quays in the harbor. Such performances were futile and ridiculous, and they belong

only to his youth. It seems certain that he schooled himself to the suppression of such evidences of his anger, and that he did so largely by shutting up within his breast all the fire that rose there. The *Correspondence*—dark lantern as it is—seems to illuminate this condition of things; we see before us Ibsen with his hands clenched, his mouth tightly shut, rigid with determination not to "let himself go," the eyes alone blazing behind the gleaming spectacles.

An instance of his suppression of personal feeling may be offered. The lengthiest of all Ibsen's published letters describes to Brandes (April 25, 1866) the suicide, at Rome, of a young Danish lawyer, Ludvig David, of whom Ibsen had seen a good deal. The lad threw himself head-foremost out of window, in a crisis of fever. Ibsen writes down all the minutest details with feeling and refinement, but with as little sympathetic emotion as if he was drawing up a report for the police. With this trait may be compared his extreme interest in the detailed accounts of public trials; he liked to read exactly what the prisoner said, and all the evidence of the witnesses. In this Ibsen resembled Robert Browning, whose curiosity about the small incidents surrounding a large event was boundless. When Ibsen, in the course of such an investigation, found the real purpose

of some strange act dawn upon him, he exhibited an almost childish pleasure; and this was doubled when the interpretation was one which had not presented itself to the conventional legal authorities.

In everything connected with the execution of his own work there was no limit to the pains which he was willing to take. His handwriting had always been neat, but it was commonplace in his early years. The exquisite calligraphy which he ultimately used on every occasion, and the beauty of which was famous far and wide, he adopted deliberately when he was in Rome in 1862. To the end of his life, although in the latest years the letters lost, from the shakiness of his hand, some of their almost Chinese perfection, he wrote his smallest notes in this character. His zeal for elaboration as an artist led him to collect a mass of consistent imaginary information about the personages in his plays, who became to him absolutely real. It is related how, some one happening to say that Nora, in *A Doll's House*, had a curious name, Ibsen immediately replied, "Oh! her full name was Leonora; but that was shortened to Nora when she was quite a little girl. Of course, you know, she was terribly spoilt by her parents." Nothing of this is revealed in the play itself, but Ibsen was familiar with the past history of all the characters he created. All

through his career he seems to have been long haunted by the central notion of his pieces, and to have laid it aside, sometimes for many years, until a set of incidents spontaneously crystallized around it. When the medium in which he was going to work became certain he would put himself through a long course of study in the technical phraseology appropriate to the subject. No pains were too great to prepare him for the final task.

When Mr. Archer visited Ibsen in the Harmonien Hotel at Sæby in 1887 he extracted some valuable evidence from him as to his methods of composition:—

> It seems that the *idea* of a piece generally presents itself before the characters and incidents, though, when I put this to him flatly, he denied it. It seems to follow, however, from his saying that there is a certain stage in the incubation of a play when it might as easily turn into an essay as into a drama. He has to incarnate the ideas, as it were, in character and incident, before the actual work of creation can be said to have fairly begun. Different plans and ideas, he admits, often flow together, and the play he ultimately produces is sometimes very unlike the intention with which he set out. He writes and re-writes, scribbles and destroys, an enormous amount before he makes the exquisite fair copy he sends to Copenhagen.

He altered, as we have said, the printed text of his earlier works, in order to bring them into

harmony with his finished style, but he did not do this, so far as I remember, after the publication of *Brand*. In the case of all the dramas of his maturity he modified nothing when the work had once been given to the world.

CHAPTER X

INTELLECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

HAVING accustomed ourselves to regard Ibsen as a disturbing and revolutionizing force, which met with the utmost resistance at the outset, and was gradually accepted before the close of his career, we may try to define what the nature of his revolt was, and what it was, precisely, that he attacked. It may be roughly said that what peculiarly roused the animosity of Ibsen was the character which has become stereotyped in one order of ideas, good in themselves but gradually outworn by use, and which cannot admit ideas of a new kind. Ibsen meditated upon the obscurantism of the old *régime* until he created figures like Rosmer, in whom the characteristics of that school are crystallized. From the point of view which would enter sympathetically into the soul of Ibsen and look out on the world from his eyes, there is no one of his plays more valuable in its purely theoretic way than *Rosmersholm*. It dissects the decrepitude of ancient formulas, it surveys the ruin of ancient faiths. The curse of

heredity lies upon Rosmer, who is highly intelligent up to a certain point, but who can go no further. Even if he is persuaded that a new course of action would be salutary, he cannot move—he is bound in invisible chains. It is useless to argue with Rosmer; his reason accepts the line of logic, but he simply cannot, when it comes to action, cross the bridge where Beate threw herself into the torrent.

But Ibsen had not the ardor of the fighting optimist. He was one who "doubted clouds would break," who dreamed, since "right was worsted, wrong would triumph." With Robert Browning he had but this one thing in common, that both were fighters, both "held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better," but the dark fatalism of the Norwegian poet was in other things in entire opposition to the sunshiny hopefulness of the English one. Browning and Ibsen alike considered that the race must be reformed periodically or it would die. The former anticipated reform as cheerily as the sower expects harvest. Ibsen had no such happy certainty. He was convinced of the necessity of breaking up the old illusions, the imaginative call for revolt, but his faith wavered as to the success of the new movements. The old order, in its resistance to all change, is very strong. It may be shaken, but

it is the work of a blind Sampson, and no less, to bring it rattling to the ground. In *Rosmersholm*, all the modern thought, all the vitality, all the lucidity belong to Rebecca, but the decrepit formulas are stoutly intrenched. In the end it is not the new idea who conquers; it is the antique house, with its traditions, its avenging vision of white horses, which breaks the too-clairvoyant Rebecca.

This doubt of the final success of intelligence, this obstinate question whether, after all, as we so glibly intimate, the old order changeth at all, whether, on the contrary, it has not become a Juggernaut car that crushes all originality and independence out of action, this breathes more and more plainly out of the progressing work of Ibsen. Hedda Gabler condemns the old order, in its dulness, its stifling mediocrity, but she is unable to adapt her energy to any wholesome system of new ideas, and she sinks into deeper moral dissolution. She hates all that has been done, yet can herself do nothing, and she represents, in symbol, that detestable condition of spirit which cannot create, though it sees the need of creation, and can only show the irritation which its own sterility awakens within it by destruction. All Hedda can actually do, to assert her energy, is to burn the MS. of Lövborg, and to kill herself with General Gabler's pistol. The race must be reformed or die; the

Hedda Gablers which adorn its latest phase do best to die.

We have seen that Ibsen's theory was that love of self is the fundamental principle of all activity. It is the instinct of self-preservation and self-amelioration which leads to every manifestation of revolt against stereotyped formulas of conduct. Between the excessive ideality of Rebecca and the decadent sterility of Hedda Gabler comes another type, perhaps more sympathetic than either, the master-builder Solness. He, too, is led to condemn the old order, but in the act of improving it he is overwhelmed upon his pinnacle, and swoons to death, "dizzy, lost, yet unupbraiding." Ibsen's exact meaning in the detail of these symbolic plays will long be discussed, but they repay the closest and most reiterated study. Perhaps the most curious of all is *The Lady from the Sea*, which has been examined from the technically psychological view by a learned French philosopher, M. Jules de Gaultier. For M. de Gaultier the interest which attaches to Ibsen's conception of human life, with its conflicting instincts and responsibilities, is more fully centred in *The Lady from the Sea* than in any other of his productions.

The theory of the French writer is that Ibsen's constant aim is to reconcile and to conciliate the

two biological hypotheses which have divided opinion in the nineteenth century, and which are known respectively by the names of Cuvier and Lamarck; namely, that of the invariability of species and that of the mutability of organic forms. In the reconciliation of these hypotheses Ibsen finds the only process which is truly encouraging to life. According to this theory, all the trouble, all the weariness, all the waste of moral existences around us comes from the neglect of one or other of these principles, and true health, social or individual, is impossible without the harmonious application of them both. According to this view, the apotheosis of Ibsen's genius, or at least the most successful elucidation of his scheme of ideological drama, is reached in the scene in *The Lady from the Sea* where Wangel succeeds in winning the heart of Ellida back from the fascination of the Stranger. It is certainly in this mysterious and strangely attractive play that Ibsen has insisted, more than anywhere else, on the necessity of taking physiology into consideration in every discussion of morals. He refers, like a zoölogist, to the laws which regulate the formation and the evolution of species, and the decision of Ellida, on which so much depends, is an amazing example of the limitation of the power of change produced by heredity. The extraordinary

ingenuity of M. de Gaultier's analysis of this play deserves recognition; whether it can quite be accepted, as embraced by Ibsen's intention, may be doubtful. At the same time, let us recollect that, however subtle our refinements become, the instinct of Ibsen was probably subtler still.

In 1850, when Ibsen first crept forward, with the glimmering taper of his *Catilina*, there was but one person in the world who fancied that the light might pass from lamp to lamp and in half a century form an important part of the intellectual illumination of Europe. The one person who did suspect it was, of course, Ibsen himself. Against all probability and common-sense, this apothecary's assistant, this ill-educated youth who had just been plucked in his preliminary examination, who positively was, and remained, unable to pass the first tests and become a student at the University, maintained in his inmost soul the belief that he was born to be "a king of thought." The impression is perhaps not uncommon among ill-educated lads; what makes the case unique, and defeats our educational formulas, is that it happened to be true. But the impact of Ibsen with the social order of his age was unlucky, we see, from the first; it was perhaps more unlucky than that of any other great man of the same class with whose biography

we have been made acquainted. He was at daggers drawn with all that was successful and respectable and "nice" from the outset of his career until near the end of it.

Hence we need not be surprised if in the tone of his message to the world there is something acrimonious, something that tastes in the mouth like aloes. He prepared a dose for a sick world, and he made it as nauseous and astringent as he could, for he was not inclined to be one of those physicians who mix jam with their julep. There was no other writer of genius in the nineteenth century who was so bitter in dealing with human frailty as Ibsen was. By the side of his cruel clearness the satire of Carlyle is bluster, the diatribes of Leopardi shrill and thin. All other reformers seem angry and benevolent by turns, Ibsen is uniformly and impartially stern. That he probed deeper into the problems of life than any other modern dramatist is acknowledged, but it was his surgical calmness which enabled him to do it. The problem-plays of Alexandre Dumas *fils* flutter with emotion, with prejudice and pardon. But Ibsen, without impatience, examines under his microscope all the protean forms of organic social life and coldly draws up his diagnosis like a report. We have to think of him as thus ceaselessly occupied. We have seen that,

long before a sentence was written, he had invented and studied, in its remotest branches, the life-history of the characters who were to move in his play. Nothing was unknown to him of their experience, and for nearly two years, like a coral-insect, he was building up the scheme of them in silence. Odd little objects, fetiches which represented people to him, stood arranged on his writing table, and were never to be touched. He gazed at them until, as if by some feat of black magic, he turned them into living persons, typical and yet individual.

We have recorded that the actual writing down of the dialogue was often swift and easy, when the period of incubation was complete. Each of Ibsen's plays presupposes a long history behind it; each starts like an ancient Greek tragedy, in the full process of catastrophe. This method of composition was extraordinary, was perhaps, in modern times, unparalleled. It accounted in measure for the coherency, the inevitability, of all the detail, but it also accounted for some of the difficulties which meet us in the task of interpretation. Ibsen calls for an expositor, and will doubtless give occupation to an endless series of scholiasts. They will not easily exhaust their theme, and to the last something will escape, something will defy their most careful examination. It is not disre-

spectful to his memory to claim that Ibsen sometimes packed his stuff too closely. Criticism, when it marvels most at the wonder of his genius, is constrained to believe that he sometimes threw too much of his soul into his composition, that he did not stand far enough away from it always to command its general effect. The result, especially in the later symbolical plays, is too vibratory, and excites the spectator too much.

One very curious example of Ibsen's minute care is found in the copiousness of his stage directions. Later playwrights have imitated him in this, and we have grown used to it; but thirty years ago such minuteness seemed extravagant and needless. As a fact, it was essential to the absolutely complete image which Ibsen desired to produce. The stage directions in his plays cannot be "skipped" by any reader who desires to follow the dramatist's thought step by step without losing the least link. These notes of his intention will be of ever-increasing value as the recollection of his personal wishes is lost. In 1899 Ibsen remarked to me that it was almost useless for actors nowadays to try to perform the comedies of Holberg, because there were no stage directions and the tradition was lost. Of his own work, fortunately, that can never be said. Dr. Verrall, in his brilliant and penetrating studies

of the Greek Tragedies, has pointed out more than once the "undesigned and unforeseen defect with which, in studying ancient drama, we must perpetually reckon," namely, the loss of the action and of the equivalent stage directions. It is easy to imagine "what problems Shakespeare would present if he were printed like the *Poetæ Scenici Græci*," and not more difficult to realize how many things there would be to puzzle us in *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck* if we possessed nothing but the bare text.

The body of work so carefully conceived, so long maintained, so passionately executed, was far too disturbing in its character to be welcome at first. In the early eighties the name of Ibsen was loathed in Norway, and the attacks on him which filled the press were often of an extravagant character. At the present moment any one conversant with Norwegian society who will ask a priest or a schoolmaster, an officer or a doctor, what has been the effect of Ibsen's influence, will be surprised at the unanimity of the reply. Opinions may differ as to the attractiveness of the poet's art or of its skill, but there is an almost universal admission of its beneficial tendency. Scarcely will a voice be found to demur to the statement that Ibsen let fresh air and light into the national life, that he roughly but thor-

oughly awakened the national conscience, that even works like *Ghosts*, which shocked, and works like *Rosmersholm*, which insulted the prejudices of his countrymen, were excellent in their result. The conquest of Norway by this dramatist, who reviled and attacked and abandoned his native land, who railed at every national habit and showed a worm at the root of every national tradition, is amazing. The fierce old man lived long enough to be accompanied to his grave "to the noise of the mourning of a nation," and he who had almost starved in exile to be conducted to the last resting-place by a Parliament and a King.

It must always be borne in mind that, although Ibsen's appeal is to the whole world—his determination to use prose aiding him vastly in this dissemination—yet it is to Norway that he belongs, and it is at home that he is best understoood. No matter how acrid his tone, no matter how hard and savage the voice with which he prophesied, the accord between his country and himself was complete long before the prophet died. As he walked about, the strange, picturesque little old man, in the streets of Christiania, his fellow-citizens gazed at him with a little fear, but with some affection and with unbounded reverence. They understood at last what the meaning of his

message had been, and how closely it applied to themselves, and how much the richer and healthier for it their civic atmosphere had become. They would say, as the soul of Dante said in the *New Life*:—

è costui
Che viene a consolar la nostra mente,
Ed è la sua virtù tanto possente,
Ch'altro pensier non lascia star con nui.

No words, surely, could better express the intensity with which Ibsen had pressed his moral quality, his *virtù*, upon the Norwegian conscience, not halting in his pursuit till he had captured it and had banished from it all other ideals of conduct. No one who knows will doubt that the recent events in which Norway has taken so chivalric, and at the same time so winning and gracious, an attitude in the eyes of the world, owe not a little to their being the work of a generation nurtured in that new temper of mind, that *spiritel nuovo d'amore* which was inculcated by the whole work of Ibsen.